Minick

(Old Man Minick)

EDNA
FERBER
AND
GEORGE S.
KAUFMAN

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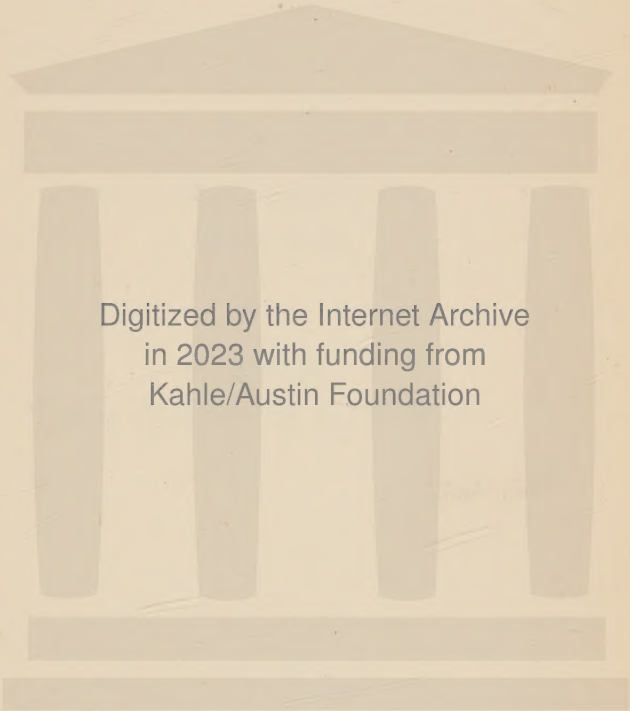
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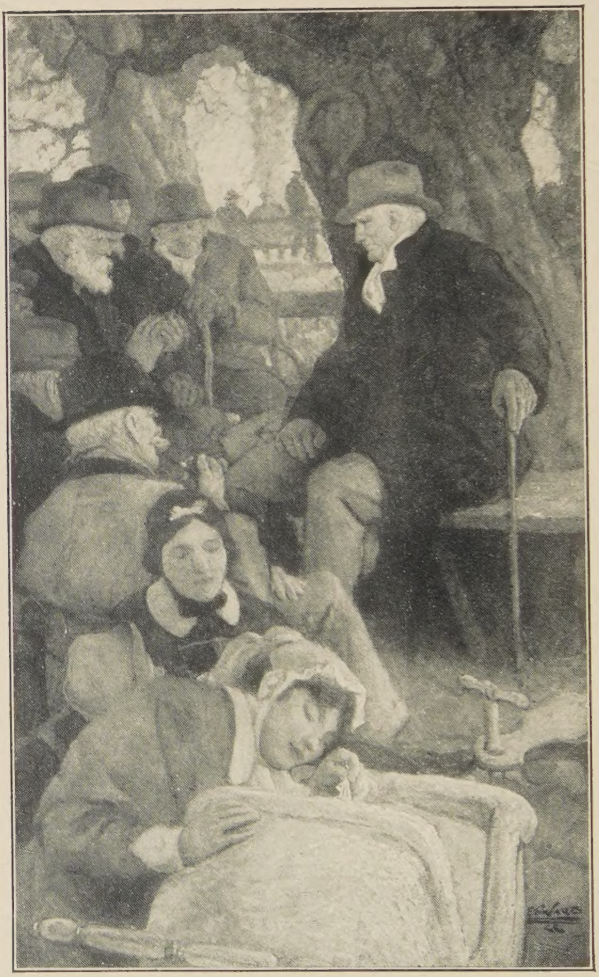
OLD MAN MINICK

A Short Story

and

MINICK

A Play Based on the Short Story



"In the park old man Minick and all the old men gathered there found a Forum—a safety valve—a means of expression."

THIS VOLUME CONTAINS:

OLD MAN MINICK

A SHORT STORY

BY

EDNA FERBER

MINICK

A PLAY BASED ON THE SHORT STORY

BY

EDNA FERBER *and*
GEORGE S. KAUFMAN

ALSO A BRIEF AND QUITE GRATUITOUS
EXPLANATION BY THE AUTHORS

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1924

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138824

Produced by Winthrop Ames at the Booth Theatre, New York, September 24th, 1924, with the following cast:

LIL COREY ..... ANTOINETTE PERRY
NETTIE MINICK ..... PHYLLIS POVAH
ANNIE ..... BEATRICE MORELAND
JIM COREY ..... SYDNEY BOOTH
FRED MINICK ..... FREDERICK BURT
OLD MAN MINICK..... O. P. HEGGIE
AL DIAMOND ..... RALPH BUNKER
MARGE DIAMOND ..... MYRA HAMPTON
LULA ..... EMMA WISE
MR. DIETENHOFER ..... CHARLES R. BURROWS
MR. PRICE ..... THOMAS MEEGAN
MRS. SMALLRIDGE ..... LAVINIA SHANNON
MISS CRACKENWALD ..... MARY HUBBARD
MRS. LIPPINCOTT ..... JESSIE GRAHAM
MISS STACK ..... ANN WINSLOW

Stage Manager: John Clements

THE SCENE

Living-room of Fred and Nettie Minick's Apartment, 5218 South Park Avenue, Chicago.

ACT I.—An Evening in Spring.

ACT II.—Six Months Later. A November Afternoon.

ACT III.—The Following Morning.

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AN EXPLANATION

It is in response to one of the smallest nation-wide demands in history that these random notes about the writing of "Minick" are set down. In the beginning we were moved to undertake an explanatory article by the frequency with which we encountered the well-meaning query: *"Tell* me—*how* do you make a play out of a short story?" A little meditation, however, convinced us that the question would have to be answered by more skilled technicians than those who are wielding this twin pen. Frankly, we don't know.

All that remains, then, is to tell something about the problems encountered in the turning of this *particular* story into a play. If, in so doing, we can shed even a narrow gleam upon the hazardous process of dramatization—if one person who has asked the question picks up this volume and finds half of one per cent of the answer—then the undersigned will be both pleased and astonished, equal parts.

Herein, then, are to be found merely sundry notes—in the main disconnected—having to do with the fashioning of "Minick," the play, out of "Old Man Minick," the short story. Inevitably, it will be an article in which a certain consciousness of accomplishment will be detectable: probably there will be spots in it where we seem to be stand-

ing proudly at one side and remarking: "Oh, look what we did!" Something of this, however, is almost unavoidable in an article of the kind; if at any point the reader becomes over-conscious of it we can only advise him to put down the book, as gently as possible, and bring suit.

One thing more. The points that we have taken up are reasonably technical, and deal with intimate details of the story and the play. Properly speaking, these few pages should have been placed at the back of the book, and the contents read in that order. Perhaps, if it weren't for an uneasy feeling that you might never reach them, they would have been. At all events, here they are. Reading them, you will at least understand why "Minick" isn't a better play.

"How do you make a play out of a short story?" There seemed, in the minds of the questioners, to be a clear intimation that it would be a hard job primarily because a short story is short. You can read a short story in fifteen or twenty minutes; a play must last for two and a half hours. How do you *ever*—that is, where do you get enough *stuff* to—*you* know what I mean.

Probably none of those who asked the question really meant it—they were just graciously leading the conversation into channels that they felt would be flattering. The facts in the case are almost too obvious to require pointing out: that not the length of a story, but the theatrical effectiveness of its idea, is the important thing where a

dramatization is concerned. As a matter of fact, the average short story is more likely to be dramatic material than is the average novel—although this may be a foolish generalisation. But, in general, the short story is concise, rounded, built around a central climax, and concerned with a definite group of characters. The novel is more likely to be a wandering affair—spread over the years, perhaps, and with form only a secondary consideration. The problem of encasing its several stories within the confines of a play is a difficult one.

Then too, novels are more widely read than short stories, and you have therefore a larger audience that comes to the play with a preconceived idea as to what it ought to contain. And this group the playwright never can satisfy: each member of it has picked a favourite bit from the novel, and is lamentably disappointed if it is not included in the play—and included, mind you, in the exact form and circumstances in which it figured in the novel. It may require laying an entire act in a dentist's waiting room—let us say that the favourite episode was concerned with the presence on the dentist's table of *World's Work* for May, 1896—but the admirers of that situation will always feel certain that its inclusion was vital to the play. The fact that you have to show little Ethelind being hurled from her pony cart at exactly that point in the play, and that she would hardly be out riding in a dentist's waiting room, is an obstacle that is tossed lightly aside.

To be sure, dramatizing a short story instead of a novel does not entirely free you from this audience. Two questions were hurled at us with particular frequency after the play was announced for production: "Have you got the scene with the old men in the park?" and "How about the pillows—did you get them in?" No one, as yet, has written a hot letter of protest because Nettie's husband is named George in the short story and emerges as Fred in the play, nor has there been objection to the omission of the episode of the sewing woman.

But the pillows and the park recurred again and again. So far as we can recall, the presence of the pillows in the play marks the only instance in which a deliberate attempt was made to appease those who had read the story. It may be broadly stated that such a policy is always a mistake in the case of a dramatization—certainly the episode of the pillows means practically nothing in "Minick," and might as well not be there. One is likely to forget, in the course of dramatizing a story, just how small will be the proportion of the audience that has read the story. Any figures, of course, would be guess work, but there are unlikely to be more than one out of a hundred. And if the play enjoys a long run the proportion will be even smaller.

As for the scene in the park—in which, it will be recalled, the old men elaborately discuss everything from the big issues of the day to

the detailed movements of a young woman sitting on the grass—it was early decided that this would be more effective indoors. The reasons were numerous. In the first place, nothing that the old men said or did in the park was sufficiently weighty to support an entire act, and to endeavour to inject a plot element into such a scene would almost surely have been fatal. (Consider, for example, what it would have meant to have brought Fred and Nettie arbitrarily into the park and straight to the bench on which Old Man Minick was sitting—parks are so small after all!—and of the cosy little scene of domestic upheaval that could have been staged in these surroundings.) The alternative method of keeping the park locale would have been to have broken an act into two scenes, one in the park and one in the house. This, however, would have meant untold scenic difficulties. A dull wait of several minutes for the change of scene; a stage park that would always look just a little like a stage park, no matter how cleverly contrived (particularly risky in a play written for realism), and the additional fact that the scene in the house, because it would have to be built for quick clearing, never could be quite as roomy and as real as it ought to be. These the negative arguments; on the other side was the fact that far greater dramatic value could be got by bringing the old men into Nettie's carefully kept apartment. (She could hardly have scolded them for dropping ashes on

the nice clean park.) Nettie's attitude toward the old men, growing out of this scene, could be used to help Minick toward a realisation of his false position in the household, and thus a seemingly irrelevant scene could be knit into the body and the theme of the play. In the park, it could never have been anything but one-dimensional.

And then, to clear up the points of departure between story and play, there was The Baby. As the time went on it came to be spoken of with bigger and bigger capital letters. In the beginning there was no thought but that The Baby was the solution of the play—Minick would overhear Nettie say that she could not have a child while he continued to live with them, just as he did in the story, and there would be the reason for his departure. This was the original third act of the play. In the story, of course, it was a simple matter to say that the old man had overheard Nettie's remark; on the stage he had to be shown overhearing it, and it meant a tricky bit of mechanics. So, in an endeavour to avoid the usual theatrical device and thus give the scene a certain plausibility, it was planned to reverse the usual process —Minick, instead of hiding behind a screen somewhere, would be in full view of the audience, and Nettie would utter the fatal words to Lil while sipping coffee in the adjoining room. To this end a scene of no plot consequence was played in the dining room at an earlier point

in the act—so that the audience, accustomed to a scene's being placed in a somewhat remote part of the stage, would accept the later and vital scene with a minimum of questioning. To this end, also, it was arranged to provide Nettie with a cup of coffee long after the breakfast hour, so that she and Lil might reasonably be drawn into the dining room.

Winthrop Ames and Woodman Thompson, respectively the producer and the scene designer —and a good deal more—were the first to sense the awkwardness of the scene that we had contrived. They made every attempt to give it plausibility. By ingeniously setting the room at an angle they brought the dining room within easy view of most of the audience, and, by a fluid movement of characters between the two rooms in earlier scenes, Mr. Ames sought to establish the dining room as a part of the stage proper, all to the end that a badly conceived scene might take on conviction when it finally arrived. But it didn't. At the first performance out of town it was apparent that it never would work. Minick was required to come boldly onto the stage and anchor himself in a certain spot long enough to hear what Nettie was saying. It was just a bit of bad theatre in a play that had been trying—trying too hard, perhaps—to keep away from theatre, good or bad.

In an endeavour to improve matters we first made them worse. We went back to the con-

ventional stage overhearing. The two women were permitted to sip their coffee on stage, and during the vital dialogue they were required to face steadfastly in a certain direction, so that Minick might enter and overhear without being seen. It proved even more false than the earlier device, and it began to be clear that Minick could not be permitted to overhear at all if we wanted to preserve an atmosphere of realism. We considered, first in jest and later in desperation, the expedient of having the state of affairs revealed to him by the Negro maid. The Baby, of course, was dramatically useless unless we could plausibly call it to Minick's attention; that failing, we would have to abandon the whole baby idea.

Then a rather astonishing thing happened. We found that The Baby never had belonged in the play at all (as a motivating force, that is; it still figures in a casual way). The entire contents of Acts I and II had been such as to show Minick's complete incompatibility with the household in which he lived; if the play were to become a rounded whole the material of these acts would have become the driving force of Act III. The hopelessness of the old man's evenings, the fact that he could not entertain his friends in the house, his interference in Fred's business and in Nettie's club meeting—all of these clearly pointed the way and constituted the play. Suddenly to abandon them in Act III, and to substitute for them a new and purely local device for

sending Minick away, would be to throw away the play and everything that it meant. How we overlooked this obvious point in the original writing of the play we never have been able to figure. Our only excuse is that the third act was planned and written in about twenty-four hours—and at a time when we were thoroughly tired from writing the first two.

In all, there were a good many last acts. The mere fact that we had hit upon our major falsity did not mean that we immediately wrote the right last act—on the contrary, three or four versions were written and played before we found one that was satisfactory. The one included in this volume, and used in the playing version, is the next to the last that was written. The final one, most of which was never even rehearsed, lies somewhere between New York and Buffalo.

A few words, so long as the matter has already been touched upon, about the way in which the play was written. The three acts were turned out in seven driving days—days and nights, for that matter—but some six or eight weeks of preliminary work preceded the writing. Most of this was devoted to detailed discussion, but there was also some playwriting. Each of us wrote large parts of an act—one the first and one the second—and, although practically all of this dialogue was discarded when we came to work together, it did serve as a valuable basis. The first two acts were planned in detail before we began joint writing; hardly a thought was given to the

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contents of the last until the first two were finished. As already intimated, it was not a working scheme that made for sound last acts.

But, if too little thought was bestowed upon the final act, there were other points of the play where consideration was fairly lavished. There was, for example, the matter of Fred's business—the selection of the line of work in which he was engaged when he took up the mail order scheme. This, we felt, had to be picked with a good deal of care; we wanted something substantially prosaic, something that would lend itself to a good deal of commonplace business talk around the house. Line after line was considered and dropped; Fred was successively a shopkeeper, a travelling salesman, an insurance agent. Nothing seemed to fit just exactly with the well-to-do middle-class atmosphere in which we wanted the characters to move. We spent two entire days in discussing this point and nothing else; we interviewed business friends and haunted the commercial districts for two days more. Then finally we hit it. Fred would be credit man for a large office fixture concern—it was a line of work that would bring with it a rich vocabulary, and this we would sprinkle copiously through the play. Perhaps there would be one or two scenes devoted to business talk alone. . . . We have, of course, elaborately foreshadowed the dénouement. The result: there is not a line in the play that contains even a remote reference to Fred's work as a credit

man, and from first to last the nature of his business never mattered in the least.

Finally, there is the title. The play, of course, should be called "Old Man Minick," and in the beginning it was. But it seems that there is a large and growing class of playgoers who become frightened at the prospect of seeing an old man on the stage, and run and hide in cellars. We rather thought—basing our guess on "Lightnin'" and "The Music Master" and "Rip Van Winkle" and some others—that the opposite would be the case. But when we heard of gay dinner parties shuddering with horror at the merest mention of a play with "Old Man" in the title, and when, in the early days on the road, whole towns remained steadfastly away from the theatre in which the play was being acted, we weakened and agreed to the change. After all, even collaborators must live.

THE AUTHORS.

THE STORY:

OLD MAN MINICK

by

EDNA FERBER

OLD MAN MINICK

His wife had always spoiled him outrageously. No doubt of that. Take, for example, the matter of the pillows merely. Old man Minick slept high. That is, he thought he slept high. He liked two plump pillows on his side of the great, wide, old-fashioned cherry bed. He would sink into them with a vast grunting and sighing and puffing expressive of nerves and muscles relaxed and gratified. But in the morning there was always one pillow on the floor. He had thrown it there. Always, in the morning, there it lay, its plump white cheek turned reproachfully up at him from the side of the bed. Ma Minick knew this, naturally, after forty years of the cherry bed. But she never begrudged him that extra pillow. Each morning, when she arose, she picked it up on her way to shut the window. Each morning the bed was made up with two pillows on his side of it, as usual.

Then there was the window. Ma Minick liked it open wide. Old man Minick, who rather prided himself on his modernism (he called it being up to date), was distrustful of the night air. In the folds of its sable mantle lurked a swarm of dread things—colds, clammy miasmas, fevers.

"Night air's just like any other air," Ma Minick would say, with some asperity. Ma Minick was no worm; and as modern as he. So when they went to bed the window would be open wide. They would lie there, the two old ones, talking comfortably about commonplace things. The kind of talk that goes on between a man and woman who have lived together in wholesome peace (spiced with occasional wholesome bickerings) for more than forty years.

"Remind me to see Gerson to-morrow about that lock on the basement door. The paper's full of burglars."

"If I think of it." She never failed to.

"George and Nettie haven't been over in a week now."

"Oh, well, young folks . . . Did you stop in and pay that Koritz the fifty cents for pressing your suit?"

"By golly, I forgot again! First thing in the morning."

A sniff. "Just smell the Yards." It was Chicago.

"Wind must be from the west."

Sleep came with reluctant feet, but they wooed her patiently. And presently she settled down between them and they slept lightly. Usually, some time during the night, he awoke, slid cautiously and with infinite stealth from beneath the covers, and closed the wide-flung window to within a bare two inches of the sill. Almost invariably she heard him; but she was a wise old

woman; a philosopher of parts. She knew better than to allow a window to shatter the peace of their marital felicity. As she lay there, smiling a little grimly in the dark and giving no sign of being awake, she thought, "Oh, well, I guess a closed window won't kill me either."

Still, sometimes, just to punish him a little, and to prove that she was nobody's fool, she would wait until he had dropped off to sleep again and then she, too, would achieve a stealthy trip to the window and would raise it slowly, carefully, inch by inch.

"How did that window come to be open?" he would say in the morning, being a poor dissembler.

"Window? Why, it's just the way it was when we went to bed." And she would stoop to pick up the pillow that lay on the floor.

There was little or no talk of death between this comfortable, active, sound-appearing man of almost seventy and this plump capable woman of sixty-six. But as always, between husband and wife, it was understood wordlessly (and without reason) that old man Minick would go first. Not that either of them had the slightest intention of going. In fact, when it happened they were planning to spend the winter in California and perhaps live there indefinitely if they liked it and didn't get too lonesome for George and Nettie, and the Chicago smoke, and Chicago noise, and Chicago smells and rush and dirt. Still, the solid sum paid yearly in insurance pre-

miums showed clearly that he meant to leave her in comfort and security. Besides, the world is full of widows. Every one sees that. But how many widowers? Few. Widows there are by the thousands; living alone; living in hotels; living with married daughters and sons-in-law or married sons and daughters-in-law. But of widowers in a like situation there are bewilderingly few. And why this should be no one knows.

So, then. The California trip never materialised. And the year that followed never was quite clear in old man Minick's dazed mind. In the first place, it was the year in which stocks tumbled and broke their backs. Gilt-edged securities showed themselves to be tinsel. Old man Minick had retired from active business just one year before, meaning to live comfortably on the fruit of a half-century's toil. He now saw that fruit rotting all about him. There was in it hardly enough nourishment to sustain them. Then came the day when Ma Minick went downtown to see Matthews about that pain right here and came home looking shrivelled, talking shrilly about nothing, and evading Pa's eyes. Followed months that were just a jumble of agony, X-rays, hope, despair, morphia, nothingness.

After it was all over: "But I was going first," old man Minick said, dazedly.

The old house on Ellis near Thirty-ninth was sold for what it would bring. George, who knew Chicago real estate if any one did, said they might as well get what they could. Things would

only go lower. You'll see. And nobody's going to have any money for years. Besides, look at the neighbourhood!

Old man Minick said George was right. He said everybody was right. You would hardly have recognised in this shrunken figure and wattled face the spruce and dressy old man whom Ma Minick used to spoil so delightfully. "You know best, George. You know best." He who used to stand up to George until Ma Minick was moved to say, "Now, Pa, you don't know everything."

After Matthews' bills, and the hospital, and the nurses and the medicines and the thousand and one things were paid there was left exactly five hundred dollars a year.

"You're going to make your home with us, Father," George and Nettie said. Alma, too, said this would be the best. Alma, the married daughter, lived in Seattle. "Though you know Ferd and I would be only too glad to have you."

Seattle! The ends of the earth. Oh, no. No! he protested, every fibre of his old frame clinging to the accustomed. Seattle, at seventy! He turned piteous eyes on his son George and his daughter-in-law Nettie. "You're going to make your home with us, Father," they reassured him. He clung to them gratefully. After it was over Alma went home to her husband and their children.

So now he lived with George and Nettie in the five-room flat on South Park Avenue, just across

from Washington Park. And there was no extra pillow on the floor.

Nettie hadn't said he couldn't have the extra pillow. He had told her he used two and she had given him two the first week. But every morning she had found a pillow cast on the floor.

"I thought you used two pillows, Father."

"I do."

"But there's always one on the floor when I make the bed in the morning. You always throw one on the floor. You only sleep on one pillow, really."

"I use two pillows."

But the second week there was one pillow. He tossed and turned a good deal there in his bedroom off the kitchen. But he got used to it in time. Not used to it, exactly, but—well——

The bedroom off the kitchen wasn't as menial as it sounds. It was really rather cosy. The five-room flat held living room, front bedroom, dining room, kitchen, and maid's room. The room off the kitchen was intended as a maid's room but Nettie had no maid. George's business had suffered with the rest. George and Nettie had said, "I wish there was a front room for you, Father. You could have ours and we'd move back here, only this room's too small for twin beds and the dressing table and the chiffonier." They had meant it—or meant to mean it.

"This is fine," old man Minick had said. "This is good enough for anybody." There was

a narrow white enamel bed and a tiny dresser and a table. Nettie had made gay cretonne covers and spreads and put a little reading lamp on the table and arranged his things. Ma Minick's picture on the dresser with her mouth sort of pursed to make it look small. It wasn't a recent picture. Nettie and George had had it framed for him as a surprise. They had often urged her to have a picture taken, but she had dreaded it. Old man Minick didn't think much of that photograph, though he never said so. He needed no photograph of Ma Minick. He had a dozen of them; a gallery of them; thousands of them. Lying on his one pillow he could take them out and look at them one by one as they passed in review, smiling, serious, chiding, praising, there in the dark. He needed no picture on his dresser.

A handsome girl, Nettie, and a good girl. He thought of her as a girl, though she was well past thirty. George and Nettie had married late. This was only the third year of their marriage. Alma, the daughter, had married young, but George had stayed on, unwed, in the old house on Ellis until he was thirty-six and all Ma Minick's friends' daughters had had a try at him in vain. The old people had urged him to marry, but it had been wonderful to have him around the house, just the same. Somebody young around the house. Not that George had stayed around very much. But when he was there you knew he was there. He whistled while dressing.

He sang in the bath. He roared down the stairway, "Ma, where's my clean shirts?" The telephone rang for him. Ma Minick prepared special dishes for him. The servant girl said, "Oh, now, Mr. George, look what you've done! Gone and spilled the grease all over my clean kitchen floor!" and wiped it up adoringly while George laughed and gobbled his bit of food filched from pot or frying pan.

They had been a little surprised about Nettie. George was in the bond business and she worked for the same firm. A plump, handsome, eyeglassed woman with fine fresh colouring, a clear skin that old man Minick called appetising, and a great coil of smooth dark hair. She wore plain tailored things and understood the bond business in a way that might have led you to think her a masculine mind if she hadn't been so feminine, too, in her manner. Old man Minick had liked her better than Ma Minick had.

Nettie had called him Pop and joked with him and almost flirted with him in a daughterly sort of way. He liked to squeeze her plump arm and pinch her soft cheek between thumb and forefinger. She would laugh up at him and pat his shoulder and that shoulder would straighten spryly and he would waggle his head doggishly.

"Look out there, George!" the others in the room would say. "Your dad'll cut you out. First thing you know you'll lose your girl, that's all."

Nettie would smile. Her teeth were white

and strong and even. Old man Minick would laugh and wink, immensely pleased and flattered. "We understand each other, don't we, Pop?" Nettie would say.

During the first years of their married life Nettie stayed home. She fussed happily about her little flat, gave parties, went to parties, played bridge. She seemed to love the ease, the relaxation, the small luxuries. She and George were very much in love. Before her marriage she had lived in a boarding house on Michigan Avenue. At mention of it now she puckered up her face. She did not attempt to conceal her fondness for these five rooms of hers, so neat, so quiet, so bright, so cosy. Over-stuffed velvet in the living room, with silk lamp-shades, and small tables holding books and magazines and little boxes containing cigarettes or hard candies. Very modern. A gate-legged table in the dining room. Caramel-coloured walnut in the bedroom, rich and dark and smooth. She loved it. An orderly woman. Everything in its place. Before eleven o'clock the little apartment was shining, spotless; cushions plumped, crumbs brushed, vegetables in cold water. The telephone. "Hello! . . . Oh, hello, Bess! Oh, hours ago . . . Not a thing . . . Well, if George is willing . . . I'll call him up and ask him. We haven't seen a show in two weeks. I'll call you back within the next half hour. . . . No, I haven't done my marketing yet. . . . Yes, and have dinner downtown. Meet at seven."

Into this orderly smooth-running mechanism was catapulted a bewildered old man. She no longer called him Pop. He never dreamed of squeezing the plump arm or pinching the smooth cheek. She called him Father. Sometimes George's Father. Sometimes, when she was telephoning, there came to him—"George's father's living with us now, you know. I can't."

They were very kind to him, Nettie and George. "Now just you sit right down here, Father. What do you want to go poking off into your own room for?"

He remembered that in the last year Nettie had said something about going back to work. There wasn't enough to do around the house to keep her busy. She was sick of afternoon parties. Sew and eat, that's all, and gossip, or play bridge. Besides, look at the money. Business was awful. The two old people had resented this idea as much as George had—more, in fact. They were scandalised.

"Young folks nowadays!" shaking their heads. "Young folks nowadays. What are they thinking of! In my days when you got married you had babies."

George and Nettie had had no babies. At first Nettie had said, "I'm so happy. I just want a chance to rest. I've been working since I was seventeen. I just want to rest, first." One year. Two years. Three. And now Pa Minick.

Ma Minick, in the old house on Ellis Avenue, had kept a loose sort of larder; not lavish, but

plentiful. They both ate a great deal, as old people are likely to do. Old man Minick, especially, had liked to nibble. A handful of raisins from the box on the shelf. A couple of nuts from the dish on the sideboard. A bit of candy rolled beneath the tongue. At dinner (sometimes, toward the last, even at noon-time) a plate of steaming soup, hot, revivifying, stimulating. Plenty of this and plenty of that. "What's the matter, Jo? You're not eating." But he was, amply. Ma Minick had liked to see him eat too much. She was wrong, of course.

But at Nettie's things were different. Hers was a sufficient but stern ménage. So many mouths to feed; just so many lamb chops. Nettie knew about calories and vitamines and mysterious things like that, and talked about them. So many calories in this. So many calories in that. He never was quite clear in his mind about these things said to be lurking in his food. He had always thought of spinach as spinach, chops as chops. But to Nettie they were calories. They lunched together, these two. George was, of course, downtown. For herself Nettie would have one of those feminine pick-up lunches; a dab of apple sauce, a cup of tea, and a slice of cold toast left from breakfast. This she would eat while old man Minick guiltily supped up his cup of warmed-over broth, or his coddled egg. She always pressed upon him any bit of cold meat that was left from the night before, or any remnants of vegetable or spaghetti. Often there was

quite a little fleet of saucers and sauce plates grouped about his main plate. Into these he dipped and swooped uncomfortably, and yet with a relish. Sometimes, when he had finished, he would look about, furtively.

"What'll you have, Father? Can I get you something?"

"Nothing, Nettie, nothing. I'm doing fine." She had finished the last of her wooden toast and was waiting for him kindly.

Still, this balanced and scientific fare seemed to agree with him. As the winter went on he seemed actually to have regained most of his former hardiness and vigour. A handsome old boy he was, ruddy, hale, with the zest of a juicy old apple, slightly withered but still sappy. It should be mentioned that he had a dimple in his cheek which flashed unexpectedly when he smiled. It gave him a roguish—almost boyish—effect most appealing to the beholder. Especially the feminine beholder. Much of his spoiling at the hands of Ma Minick had doubtless been due to this mere depression of the skin.

Spring was to bring a new and welcome source of enrichment into his life. But these first six months of his residence with George and Nettie were hard. No spoiling there. He missed being made much of. He got kindness, but he needed love. Then, too, he was rather a gabby old man. He liked to hold forth. In the old house on Ellis there had been visiting back and forth between men and women of his own age,

and Ma's. At these gatherings he had waxed oratorical or argumentative, and they had heard him, some in agreement, some in disagreement, but always respectfully, whether he prated of real estate or social depravity; prohibition or European exchange.

"Let me tell you, here and now, something's got to be done before you can get a country back on a sound financial basis. Why, take Russia alone, why . . ." Or: "Young people nowadays! They don't know what respect means. I tell you there's got to be a change and there will be, and it's the older generation that's got to bring it about. What do they know of hardship! What do they know about work—real work. Most of 'em's never done a real day's work in their life. All they think of is dancing and gambling and drinking. Look at the way they dress! Look at . . ."

Ad lib.

"That's so," the others would agree. "I was saying only yesterday . . ."

Then, too, until a year or two before, he had taken active part in business. He had retired only at the urging of Ma and the children. They said he ought to rest and play and enjoy himself.

Now, as his strength and good spirits gradually returned he began to go downtown, mornings. He would dress, carefully, though a little shakily. He had always shaved himself and he kept this up. All in all, during the day, he occupied the

bathroom literally for hours, and this annoyed Nettie to the point of frenzy, though she said nothing. He liked the white cheerfulness of the little tiled room. He puddled about in the water endlessly. Snorted and splashed and puffed and snuffled and blew. He was one of those audible washers who emerge dripping and whose ablutions are distributed impartially over ceiling, walls, and floor.

Nettie, at the closed door: "Father, are you all right?"

Splash! Prrrf! "Yes. Sure. I'm all right."

"Well, I didn't know. You've been in there so long."

He was a neat old man, but there was likely to be a spot or so on his vest or his coat lapel, or his tie. Ma used to remove these, on or off him, as the occasion demanded, rubbing carefully and scolding a little, making a chiding sound between tongue and teeth indicative of great impatience of his carelessness. He had rather enjoyed these sounds, and this rubbing and scratching on the cloth with the fingernail and moistened rag. They indicated that some one cared. Cared about the way he looked. Had pride in him. Loved him. Nettie never removed spots. Though infrequently she said, "Father, just leave that suit out, will you? I'll send it to the cleaner's with George's. The man's coming to-morrow morning." He would look down at himself, hastily, and attack a spot here and there with a futile fingernail.

His morning toilette completed, he would make for the Fifty-first Street L. Seated in the train he would assume an air of importance and testy haste; glance out of the window; look at his watch. You got the impression of a handsome and well-preserved old gentleman on his way downtown to consummate a shrewd business deal. He had been familiar with Chicago's downtown for fifty years and he could remember when State Street was a tree-shaded cottage district. The noise and rush and clangour of the Loop had long been familiar to him. But now he seemed to find the downtown trip arduous, even hazardous. The roar of the elevated trains, the hoarse hoots of the motor horns, the clang of the street cars, the bedlam that is Chicago's downtown district bewildered him, frightened him almost. He would skip across the street like a harried hare, just missing a motor truck's nose and all unconscious of the stream of invective directed at him by its charioteer. "Heh! Whatcha! . . . Look!"— Sometimes a policeman came to his aid, or attempted to, but he resented his proffered help.

"Say, look here, my lad," he would say to the tall, tired, and not at all burly (standing on one's feet directing traffic at Wabash and Madison for eight hours a day does not make for burliness) policeman, "I've been coming downtown since long before you were born. You don't need to help me. I'm no jay from the country."

He visited the Stock Exchange. This de-

pressed him. Stocks were lower than ever and still going down. His five hundred a year was safe, but the rest seemed doomed for his lifetime, at least. He would drop in at George's office. George's office was pleasantly filled with dapper, neat young men and (surprisingly enough) dapper, slim young women, seated at desks in the big light-flooded room. At one corner of each desk stood a polished metal placard on a little standard and bearing the name of the desk's occupant. Mr. Owens. Mr. Satterlee. Mr. James. Miss Rauch. Mr. Minick.

"Hello, Father," Mr. Minick would say, looking annoyed. "What's bringing you down?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing. Just had a little business to tend to over at the Exchange. Thought I'd drop in. How's business?"

"Rotten."

"I should think it was!" Old man Minick would agree. "I—should—think it—was! Hm."

George wished he wouldn't. He couldn't have it, that's all. Old man Minick would stroll over to the desk marked Satterlee, or Owens, or James. These brisk young men would toss an upward glance at him and concentrate again on the sheets and files before them. Old man Minick would stand, balancing from heel to toe and blowing out his breath a little. He looked a bit yellow and granulated and wavering, there in the cruel morning light of the big plate glass windows. Or perhaps it was the contrast he pre-

sented with these slim, slick young salesmen.

"Well, h'are you to-day, Mr.—uh—Satterlee? What's the good word?"

Mr. Satterlee would not glance up this time. "I'm pretty well. Can't complain."

"Good. Good."

"Anything I can do for you?"

"No-o-o. No. Not a thing. Just dropped in to see my son a minute."

"I see." Not unkindly. Then, as old man Minick still stood there, balancing, Mr. Satterlee would glance up again, frowning a little. "Your son's desk is over there, I believe. Yes."

George and Nettie had a bedtime conference about these visits and Nettie told him gently, that the bond house head objected to friends and relatives dropping in. It was against office rules. It had been so when she was employed there. Strictly business. She herself had gone there only once since her marriage.

Well, that was all right. Business was like that nowadays. Rush and grab and no time for anything.

The winter was a hard one, with a record snowfall and intense cold. He stayed indoors for days together. A woman of his own age in like position could have occupied herself usefully and happily. She could have hemmed a sash-curtain; knitted or crocheted; tidied a room; taken a hand in the cooking or preparing of food; ripped an old gown; made over a new one; indulged in an occasional afternoon festivity with

women of her own years. But for old man Minick there were no small tasks. There was nothing he could do to make his place in the household justifiable. He wasn't even particularly good at those small jobs of hammering, or painting, or general "fixing." Nettie could drive a nail more swiftly, more surely than he. "Now, Father, don't you bother. I'll do it. Just you go and sit down. Isn't it time for your afternoon nap?"

He waxed a little surly. "Nap! I just got up. I don't want to sleep my life away."

George and Nettie frequently had guests in the evening. They played bridge, or poker, or talked.

"Come in, Father," George would say. "Come in. You all know Dad, don't you, folks?" He would sit down, uncertainly. At first he had attempted to expound, as had been his wont in the old house on Ellis. "I want to say, here and now, that this country's got to . . ." But they went on, heedless of him. They interrupted or refused, politely, to listen. So he sat in the room, yet no part of it. The young people's talk swirled and eddied all about him. He was utterly lost in it. Now and then Nettie or George would turn to him and with raised voice (he was not at all deaf and prided himself on it) would shout, "It's about this or that, Father. He was saying . . ."

When the group roared with laughter at a sally from one of them he would smile uncertainly

but amiably, glancing from one to the other in complete ignorance of what had passed, but not resenting it. He took to sitting more and more in his kitchen bedroom, smoking a comforting pipe and reading and re-reading the evening paper. During that winter he and Canary, the negro washwoman, became quite good friends. She washed down in the basement once a week but came up to the kitchen for her massive lunch. A walrus-waisted black woman, with a rich throaty voice, a rolling eye, and a kindly heart. He actually waited for her appearance above the laundry stairs.

"Weh, how's Mist' Minick to-day! Ah nev' did see a gemun spry's you ah fo' yo' age. No, suh! Nev' did."

At this rare praise he would straighten his shoulders and waggle his head. "I'm worth any ten of these young sprats to-day." Canary would throw back her head in a loud and companionable guffaw.

Nettie would appear at the kitchen swinging door. "Canary's having her lunch, Father. Don't you want to come into the front room with me? We'll have our lunch in another half-hour."

He followed her obediently enough. Nettie thought of him as a troublesome and rather pathetic child—a child who would never grow up. If she attributed any thoughts to that fine old head they were ambling thoughts, bordering, perhaps, on senility. Little did she know how expertly this old one surveyed her and how

ruthlessly he passed judgment. She never suspected the thoughts that formed in the active brain.

He knew about women. He had married a woman. He had had children by her. He looked at this woman—his son's wife—moving about her little five-room flat. She had theories about children. He had heard her expound them. You didn't have them except under such and such circumstances. It wasn't fair otherwise. Plenty of money for their education. Well. He and his wife had had three children. Paul, the second, had died at thirteen. A blow, that had been. They had not always planned for the coming of the three but they always had found a way, afterward. You managed, somehow, once the little wrinkled red ball had fought its way into the world. You managed. You managed. Look at George! Yet when he was born, thirty-nine years ago, Pa and Ma Minick had been hard put to it.

Sitting there, while Nettie dismissed him as negligible, he saw her clearly, grimly. He looked at her. She was plump, but not too short, with a generous width between the hips; a broad full bosom, but firm; round arms and quick slim legs; a fine sturdy throat. The curve between arm and breast made a graceful, gracious line . . . Working in a bond office . . . Working in a bond office . . . There was nothing in the Bible about working in a bond office. Here was a woman built for child-bearing.

She thought him senile, negligible.

In March Nettie had in a sewing woman for a week. She had her two or three times a year. A hawk-faced woman of about forty-nine, with a blue-bottle figure and a rapacious eye. She sewed in the dining room and there was a pleasant hum of machine and snip of scissors and murmur of conversation and rustle of silky stuff; and hot savoury dishes for lunch. She and old man Minick became great friends. She even let him take out bastings. This when Nettie had gone out from two to four, between fittings.

He chuckled and waggled his head. "I expect to be paid regular assistant's wages for this," he said.

"I guess you don't need any wages, Mr. Minick," the woman said. "I guess you're pretty well fixed."

"Oh, well, I can't complain." (Five hundred a year.)

"Complain! I should say not! If I was to complain it'd be different. Work all day to keep myself; and nobody to come home to at night."

"Widow, ma'am?"

"Since I was twenty. Work, work, that's all I've had. And lonesome! I suppose you don't know what lonesome is."

"Oh, don't I!" slipped from him. He had dropped the bastings.

The sewing woman flashed a look at him from the cold hard eye. "Well, maybe you do. I suppose living here like this, with sons and

daughters, ain't so grand, for all your money. Now me, I've always managed to keep my own little place that I could call home, to come back to. It's only two rooms, and nothing to rave about, but it's home. Evenings I just cook and fuss around. Nobody to fuss for, but I fuss, anyway. Cooking, that's what I love to do. Plenty of good food, that's what folks need to keep their strength up." Nettie's lunch that day had been rather scant.

She was there a week. In Nettie's absence she talked against her. He protested, but weakly. Did she give him egg-noggs? Milk? Hot toddy? Soup? Plenty of good rich gravy and meat and puddings? Well! That's what folks needed when they weren't so young any more. Not that he looked old. My, no. Spryer than many young boys, and handsomer than his own son if she did say so.

He fed on it, hungrily. The third day she was flashing meaning glances at him across the luncheon table. The fourth she pressed his foot beneath the table. The fifth, during Nettie's afternoon absence, she got up, ostensibly to look for a bit of cloth which she needed for sewing, and, passing him, laid a caressing hand on his shoulder. Laid it there and pressed his shoulder ever so little. He looked up, startled. The glances across the luncheon had largely passed over his head; the foot beneath the table might have been an accident. But this—this was unmistakable. He stood up, a little shakily. She

caught his hand. The hawk-like face was close to his.

"You need somebody to love you," she said. "Somebody to do for you, and love you." The hawk face came nearer. He leaned a little toward it. But between it and his face was Ma Minick's face, plump, patient, quizzical, kindly. His head came back sharply. He threw the woman's hot hand from him.

"Woman!" he cried. "Jezebel!"

The front door slammed. Nettie. The woman flew to her sewing. Old man Minick, shaking, went into his kitchen bedroom.

"Well," said Nettie, depositing her bundles on the dining-room table, "did you finish that faggoting? Why, you haven't done so very much, have you!"

"I ain't feeling so good," said the woman. "That lunch didn't agree with me."

"Why, it was a good plain lunch. I don't see——"

"Oh, it was plain enough, all right."

Next day she did not come to finish her work. Sick, she telephoned. Nettie called it an outrage. She finished the sewing herself, though she hated sewing. Pa Minick said nothing, but there was a light in his eye. Now and then he chuckled, to Nettie's infinite annoyance, though she said nothing.

"Wanted to marry me!" he said to himself, chuckling. "Wanted to marry me! The old rip!"

At the end of April, Pa Minick discovered Washington Park, and the Club, and his whole life was from that day transformed.

He had taken advantage of the early spring sunshine to take a walk, at Nettie's suggestion.

"Why don't you go into the Park, Father? It's really warm out. And the sun's lovely. Do you good."

He had put on his heaviest shirt, and a muffler, and George's old red sweater with the great white "C" on its front, emblem of George's athletic prowess at the University of Chicago; and over all, his greatcoat. He had taken warm mittens and his cane with the greyhound's-head handle, carved. So equipped he had ambled uninterestedly over to the Park across the way. And there he had found new life.

New life in old life. For the Park was full of old men. Old men like himself, with greyhound's-head canes, and mufflers and somebody's sweater worn beneath their greatcoats. They wore arctics, though the weather was fine. The skin of their hands and cheek-bones was glazed and had a tight look though it lay in fine little folds. There were splotches of brown on the backs of their hands, and on the temples and forehead. Their heavy grey or brown socks made comfortable folds above their ankles. From that April morning until winter drew on the Park saw old man Minick daily. Not only daily but by the day. Except for his meals, and

a brief hour for his after-luncheon nap, he spent all his time there.

For in the Park old man Minick and all the old men gathered there found a Forum—a safety valve—a means of expression. It did not take him long to discover that the Park was divided into two distinct sets of old men. There were the old men who lived with their married sons and daughters-in-law or married daughters and sons-in-law. Then there were the old men who lived in the Grant Home for Aged Gentlemen. You saw its fine red-brick façade through the trees at the edge of the Park.

And the slogan of these first was:

"My son and my da'ter they wouldn't want me to live in any public Home. No, sirree! They want me right there with them. In their own home. That's the kind of son and daughter I've got!"

The slogan of the second was:

"I wouldn't live with any son or daughter. Independent. That's me. My own boss. Nobody to tell me what I can do and what I can't. Treat you like a child. I'm my own boss! Pay my own good money and get my keep for it."

The first group, strangely enough, was likely to be spotted of vest and a little frayed as to collar. You saw them going on errands for their daughters-in-law. A loaf of bread. Spool of white No. 100. They took their small grandchildren to the duck pond and between the two

toddlers hand in hand—the old and infirm and the infantile and infirm—it was hard to tell which led which.

The second group was shiny as to shoes, spotless as to linen, dapper as to clothes. They had no small errands. Theirs was a magnificent leisure. And theirs was magnificent conversation. The questions they discussed and settled there in the Park—these old men—were not international merely. They were cosmic in scope.

The War? Peace? Disarmament? China? Free love? Mere conversational bubbles to be tossed in the air and disposed of in a burst of foam. Strong meat for old man Minick who had so long been fed on pap. But he soon got used to it. Between four and five in the afternoon, in a spot known as Under The Willows, the meeting took the form of a club—an open forum. A certain group made up of Socialists, Free Thinkers, parlour anarchists, bolshevists, had for years drifted there for talk. Old man Minick learned high-sounding phrases. "The Masters . . . democracy . . . toil of the many for the good of the few . . . the ruling class . . . free speech . . . the People. . . ."

The strong-minded ones held forth. The weaker ones drifted about on the outskirts, sometimes clinging to the moist and sticky paw of a round-eyed grandchild. Earlier in the day—at eleven o'clock, say—the talk was not so general nor so inclusive. The old men were likely to

drift into groups of two or three or four. They sat on sun-bathed benches and their conversation was likely to be rather smutty at times, for all they looked so mild and patriarchal and desiccated. They paid scant heed to the white-haired old women who, like themselves, were sunning in the park. They watched the young women switch by, with appreciative glances at their trim figures and slim ankles. The day of the short skirt was a grand time for them. They chuckled among themselves and made wicked comment. One saw only white-haired, placid, tremulous old men, but their minds still worked with belated masculinity like naughty small boys talking behind the barn.

Old man Minick early achieved a certain leadership in the common talk. He had always liked to hold forth. This last year had been one of almost unendurable bottling up. At first he had timidly sought the less assertive ones of his kind. Mild old men who sat in rockers in the pavilion waiting for lunch time. Their conversation irritated him. They remarked everything that passed before their eyes.

"There's a boat. Fella with a boat."

A silence. Then, heavily: "Yeh."

Five minutes.

"Look at those people laying on the grass. Shouldn't think it was warm enough for that . . . Now they're getting up."

A group of equestrians passed along the bridle path on the opposite side of the lagoon. They

made a frieze against the delicate spring greenery. The coats of the women were scarlet, vivid green, arresting, stimulating.

"Riders."

"Yes."

"Good weather for riding."

A man was fishing near by. "Good weather for fishing."

"Yes."

"Wonder what time it is, anyway." From a pocket, deep-buried, came forth a great gold blob of a watch. "I've got one minute to eleven."

Old man Minick dragged forth a heavy globe. "Mm. I've got eleven."

"Little fast, I guess."

Old man Minick shook off this conversation impatiently. This wasn't conversation. This was oral death, though he did not put it thus. He joined the other men. They were discussing Spiritualism. He listened, ventured an opinion, was heard respectfully and then combated mercilessly. He rose to the verbal fight, and won it.

"Let's see," said one of the old men. "You're not living at the Grant Home, are you?"

"No," old man Minick made reply, proudly. "I live with my son and his wife. They wouldn't have it any other way."

"Hm. Like to be independent myself."

"Lonesome, ain't it? Over there?"

"Lonesome! Say, Mr.—what'd you say your name was? Minick? Mine's Hughes—I

never was lonesome in my life 'cept for six months when I lived with my daughter and her husband and their five children. Yes, sir. That's what I call lonesome, in an eight-room flat."

George and Nettie said, "It's doing you good, Father, being out in the air so much." His eyes were brighter, his figure straighter, his colour better. It was that day he had held forth so eloquently on the emigration question. He had to read a lot—papers and magazines and one thing and another—to keep up. He devoured all the books and pamphlets about bond issues and national finances brought home by George. In the Park he was considered an authority on bonds and banking. He and a retired real estate man named Mowry sometimes debated a single question for weeks. George and Nettie, relieved, thought he ambled to the Park and spent senile hours with his drooling old friends discussing nothing amiably and witlessly. This while he was eating strong meat, drinking strong drink.

Summer sped. Was past. Autumn held a new dread for old man Minick. When winter came where should he go? Where should he go? Not back to the five-room flat all day, and the little back bedroom, and nothingness. In his mind there rang a childish old song they used to sing at school. A silly song:

> Where do all the birdies go?
> *I* know. *I* know.

But he didn't know. He was terror-stricken. October came and went. With the first of November the Park became impossible, even at noon, and with two overcoats and the sweater. The first frost was a black frost for him. He scanned the heavens daily for rain or snow. There was a cigar store and billiard room on the corner across the boulevard and there he sometimes went, with a few of his Park cronies, to stand behind the players' chairs and watch them at pinochle or rum. But this was a dull business. Besides, the Grant men never came there. They had card rooms of their own.

He turned away from his smoky little den on a drab November day, sick at heart. The winter. He tried to face it, and at what he saw he shrank and was afraid.

He reached the apartment and went around to the rear, dutifully. His rubbers were wet and muddy and Nettie's living-room carpet was a fashionable grey. The back door was unlocked. It was Canary's day downstairs, he remembered. He took off his rubbers in the kitchen and passed into the dining room. Voices. Nettie had company. Some friends, probably, for tea. He turned to go to his room, but stopped at hearing his own name. Father Minick. Father Minick. Nettie's voice.

"Of course, if it weren't for Father Minick I would have. But how can we as long as he lives with us? There isn't room. And we can't af-

ford a bigger place now, with rents what they are. This way it wouldn't be fair to the child. We've talked it over, George and I. Don't you suppose? But not as long as Father Minick is with us. I don't mean we'd use the maid's room for a—for the—if we had a baby. But I'd have to have some one in to help, then, and we'd have to have that extra room."

He stood there in the dining room, quiet. Quiet. His body felt queerly remote and numb, but his mind was working frenziedly. Clearly, too, in spite of the frenzy. Death. That was the first thought. Death. It would be easy. But he didn't want to die. Strange, but he didn't want to die. He liked Life. The Park, the trees, the Club, the talk, the whole show. . . . Nettie was a good girl . . . The old must make way for the young. They had the right to be born . . . Maybe it was just another excuse. Almost four years married. Why not three years ago? . . . The right to live. The right to live. . . .

He turned, stealthily, stealthily, and went back into the kitchen, put on his rubbers, stole out into the darkening November afternoon.

In an hour he was back. He entered at the front door this time, ringing the bell. He had never had a key. As if he were a child they would not trust him with one. Nettie's women friends were just leaving. In the air you smelled a mingling of perfume, and tea, and cakes, and powder. He sniffed it, sensitively.

"How do you do, Mr. Minick!" they said. "How are you! Well, you certainly look it. And how do you manage these gloomy days?"

He smiled genially, taking off his greatcoat and revealing the red sweater with the big white "C" on it. "I manage. I manage." He puffed out his cheeks. "I'm busy moving."

"Moving!" Nettie's startled eyes flew to his, held them. "Moving, Father?"

"Old folks must make way for the young," he said, gaily. "That's the law of life. Yes, sir! New ones. New ones."

Nettie's face was scarlet. "Father, what in the world——"

"I signed over at the Grant Home to-day. Move in next week." The women looked at her, smiling. Old man Minick came over to her and patted her plump arm. Then he pinched her smooth cheek with a quizzical thumb and forefinger. Pinched it and shook it ever so little.

"I don't know what you mean," said Nettie, out of breath.

"Yes, you do," said old man Minick, and while his tone was light and jesting there was in his old face something stern, something menacing. "Yes, you do."

When he entered the Grant Home a group of them was seated about the fireplace in the main hall. A neat, ruddy, septuagenarian circle.

They greeted him casually, with delicacy of feeling, as if he were merely approaching them at their bench in the Park.

"Say, Minick, look here. Mowry here says China ought to have been included in the four-power treaty. He says——"

Old man Minick cleared his throat. "You take China, now," he said, "with her vast and practically, you might say, virgin country, why——"

An apple-cheeked maid in a black dress and a white apron stopped before him. He paused.

"Housekeeper says for me to tell you your room's all ready, if you'd like to look at it now."

"Minute. Minute, my child." He waved her aside with the air of one who pays five hundred a year for independence and freedom. The girl turned to go. "Uh—young lady! Young lady!" She looked at him. "Tell the housekeeper two pillows, please. Two pillows on my bed. Be sure."

"Yes, sir. Two pillows. Yes, sir. I'll be sure."

THE PLAY:

MINICK

by

EDNA FERBER

and

GEORGE S. KAUFMAN

ACT I

MINICK

ACT I

TIME

The present.

SCENE

The living room of Fred and Nettie Minick's apartment at 5218 South Park Avenue, Chicago.

The building in which the Minicks live is one of those six-flat apartment houses (three apartments on each side) commonly seen in Chicago. South Park Avenue is a middle-class neighbourhood on Chicago's south side and faces Washington Park directly across the street. The Minicks live on the second floor and from their living-room windows one gets a pleasant sense of space, with perhaps a glimpse of tree-tops visible. The apartment consists of living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, and maid's bedroom.

It is, primarily, the living room that you see, but you can look into the dining room at your right through a large double doorway off the living room. You can also look well down the passage at the

right, so that people coming and going in this passage are easily seen. From this passage open the doors to bedrooms, bathroom, and kitchen. The apartment's outer door is at the left. You see only the small hallway, with a glimpse of wall mirror, hall chair, and bracket light.

The living room is modern, gay, lamplighted. A little too modern, perhaps. At any rate, Old Man Minick is somewhat bewildered by it. It represents a middle-class attempt at a "different" room. A bay window, bright with cretonne hangings, overlooks the Park. Just next this Nettie's desk, very official looking with its neat pigeonholes, its card index, files, pads, notebooks, papers. It is the desk of the busy and capable club woman who takes her club work seriously. The telephone, too, is on this desk. Bay window and desk are at the right of the hall doorway. At the left is a well-filled book-case, on the top shelf of which are a clock and twin glass vases. At the right, and coming well down into the room, is a large table of the library type. On it are books, a lamp, a cigarette box, flowers.

There is no one on the stage as the curtain rises. From the dining room comes the sound of silverware being dumped into a

drawer with increasing vehemence. Then the drawer is slammed shut with decision. Annie is seen to go through the passage into the kitchen, and the sound of women's voices are heard from the passage. The clock on the mantel strikes once. It is half-past seven in the evening.

Lil's voice, growing clearer as she approaches the passage door, is heard before she enters.

LIL

(*Enters and calls back:*)
. . . I'll tell you what we'll do then. I'll read the names off if you want to check them and we can see how many we have on each of the—where did you say it was?

NETTIE

(*Far off*)
What?

LIL

(*Crossing to desk*)
Where's the committee list?

NETTIE

(*Far off*)
I don't hear you, Lil.

LIL

What?

NETTIE

What did you say?

LIL

Oh, never mind. I'll find it.

(*Goes to desk and searches about in it. Nettie enters from passage carrying a folded card table.*)

NETTIE

What did you say, Lil?

LIL

The committee list. Where did you say it was?

NETTIE

In the third pile under the school list.

(*Starts to set up card table.*)

LIL

Well, I don't . . . oh, yes. Here it is. You're wonderful, Net—you ought to see my desk.

NETTIE

If I didn't keep everything in its place in that desk I'd be swamped. It's the one piece of furniture in the flat that I won't let Fred use.

LIL

I wish I could keep Jim away from mine. It's

always stuffed full of old golf scores, decks of cards, and pipe cleaners.

(*Carrying papers to card table.*)

NETTIE

(*By now she has set up the table. She pulls up a chair, speaking as she settles herself.*)

Train him. Come on. We can get some of this done.

LIL

(*A glance at the clock; getting desk chair, she too, settles to work.*)

It's half-past seven already, Net. His train's in.

NETTIE

Well, it takes twenty-five minutes to get up on the L.

(*There is a bang from the kitchen; Nettie shakes her head.*)

Again!

LIL

If I were you I'd speak to her.

NETTIE

She knows she's got me.

LIL

She'd never do that in my house.

(*She notices the card table for the first time.*)

Oh, you did get a new one after all.

NETTIE

What? Oh—card table. Yes, once they begin to go . . .

(*She is evidently thinking of something else.*)

Let's see. South side . . .

(*She is ranging papers in piles.*)

Here's Mrs. Loper's.

LIL

We'll only have to stop in the middle of this.

NETTIE

They won't be here for another twenty minutes.

LIL

Jim will. He said he'd be up right after dinner.

NETTIE

He was foolish not to come for dinner, Lil.

LIL

Well, he wanted to see this man anyhow, so he thought he might as well take dinner with him.

NETTIE

(*All her attention on her work now.*)

Now, then. There are two hundred and sixty-

four school houses in Chicago. We should be able to throw open at least twenty by, say, the middle of May. That gives us two months. Then we'll . . .

LIL

Well, now, you want to do what? Divide the work according to districts first?

(*Sounds of slamming and banging from the back of the apartment. The two women look at each other.*)

NETTIE

She *is* in a vile temper. After all, Lil, I suppose it's annoying to be made to get out of your room on such short notice.

LIL

What time did he telegraph?

NETTIE

I got it at five. I don't know why he changed his mind and came to-day instead of Monday. Of course, when I told Annie she'd have to clean out her room and pack her things right away—well!

LIL

You don't think she'll leave, do you?

NETTIE

I did at first. Of course, we're paying her two dollars more a week—she's going to sleep at her

married sister's. You know—that Emma who sometimes comes in to help serve.

(*A sigh.*)

Oh, well, I hope it'll work out all right.

LIL

Net, I'm the last person in the world to want to discourage you, but it's going to make an awful difference in your household. An old man is an old man.

NETTIE

I know. But he's really a dear. And after all, he's Fred's father.

LIL

Why couldn't he stay down in Bloomington where he knows everybody? He could get a housekeeper.

NETTIE

Lil—he couldn't.

LIL

Why not?

NETTIE

Now, Lil, I'm telling this to you and nobody else. What Father Minick has left will bring him a few hundred a year, and that's all.

LIL

Really! Why, I thought he had——

NETTIE

Yes, so did we. But Mother Minick was sick for almost three years, and you know what that means, with operations. If Father Minick had only stayed in his own business. But no, he had to put every cent into that automobile thing and —gone. At his time of life!

LIL

My dear! Then——

(*She stops as the clatter of a clothes-horse is heard. There is an instant of silence and Annie appears in the passage doorway, clothes-horse in hand.*)

NETTIE

(*As Annie stands, belligerent*)
What is it, Annie?

ANNIE

I always kept the clothes-horse in my room back of the door. Where do you want it to go now?

NETTIE

Can't you keep it in the basement?

ANNIE

I can't be lugging it up all the time. I iron up here.

NETTIE

Keep it in the kitchen.

ANNIE

I got the ironing board back of the door already. And the carpet sweeper.

LIL

How about the back porch?

NETTIE

(*Eagerly*)
Yes!

ANNIE

With the smoke and the dirt from the alley!

LIL

Leave it where it is.

NETTIE

Oh, Lil, I can't have a clothes-horse in Father Minick's bedroom.

LIL

(*With an I-told-you-so air*)
Well—there you are.

NETTIE

Put it—put it in the dining room, Annie, just for to-night, and I'll find a place for it in the morning.

ANNIE

(*Grimly*)
The flat won't be any bigger in the morning.

(Flounces into dining room; the clothes-horse clatters into place; the two women look at each other, meaningly. Annie emerges from dining room through the swinging door to passage and kitchen. There's a whish-whoosh of the door at the vehemence of her exit.)

LIL

I give her a week.

NETTIE

Lil, don't say that! She's such a wonderful cook and goes right ahead with her work. I don't do a thing but the marketing.

(Rises and goes to desk, gets card catalogue and returns to table.)

Where were we?

(Reads:)

Kenwood school.

LIL

Did she make that what's-its-name we had for supper?

NETTIE

It *was* good, wasn't it? I never can have it when Fred's home. You know the way men are. Meat and potatoes—that's Fred.

LIL

Jim's the same way. Steak seven times a week, if I'd give it to him.

NETTIE

Fred, too. I'll bet that downtown to-night he ordered exactly what he'd have at home.

LIL

I've been married to Jim Corey four years. And every time we go out with the crowd on Saturday night and I order lobster salad, because it makes me feel I'm out—*you* know—Jim says, "Why don't you take something sensible? You know lobster means bicarb."

NETTIE

(*Busy with her cards*)

Englewood. Normal school, high school——

LIL

Daisy was saying only yesterday that she and George always——

(*The telephone rings.*)

NETTIE

(*Indicating her lapful of cards, etc.*)

Lil, answer it, will you? It may be Jim for you.

LIL

Jim wouldn't be 'phoning. He'll be here almost any——

(*Dies out. At telephone. Both sides of this telephone conversation can be heard*

by the audience. That is, the voice at the other end actually sounds in a squawking tone and the words can just be made out. The general effect of this telephone talk, with Nettie "putting in" occasionally, is of confusion.)

Hello!

DAISY'S VOICE

Drexel 4269?

LIL

Yes.

DAISY'S VOICE

Nettie?

LIL

No, this isn't Mrs. Minick. I'll——

NETTIE

Who is it, Lil?

DAISY'S VOICE

Is she there?

LIL

Yes, she's here. I just answered for——

DAISY'S VOICE

This is Daisy.

NETTIE

Who is it?

LIL

Who?

DAISY'S VOICE

This is Daisy.

LIL

(*Laughs*)
Isn't that weird!
(*Turns to Nettie. Repeats.*)
Isn't that weird! It's Daisy.
(*Talks in 'phone again.*)
Isn't that weird! I had your name on my lips this very minute.

DAISY'S VOICE

Sounds like Lil.

LIL

Yes, Lil. I had dinner here at Nettie's. Jim's downtown.

NETTIE

What's she want?

DAISY'S VOICE

Are you going to meet him downtown?

LIL

No, he's going to call for me here.

DAISY'S VOICE

If Nettie's busy I . . .

NETTIE

If it's about the crowd, we can't go.

LIL

(*Interrupts*)
No, she . . .

DAISY'S VOICE

(*Interrupts*)

I just wanted to be sure that she and Fred knew about to-night.

LIL

Yes, she——

DAISY'S VOICE

(*Interrupts*)
She knows about Bloom's, doesn't she?

LIL

Well, she . . .

NETTIE

Tell her Fred and I can't possibly go out to-night. I wouldn't leave Father Minick.

DAISY'S VOICE

George has found a new place where you can get practically anything you want and he says the food is delicious too. They make a specialty of sea food and they say they ship it fresh from New York. Besides it's our anniversary and I think it's mean of Nettie——

NETTIE

Tell her Fred's father's coming to live with us and he'll feel strange here and I don't think it would be right to leave him the very first night. He's an old man and I know how Fred would feel about it and——

Together

LIL

Fred's father's coming to live with them, you know, and I suppose they feel it wouldn't be right to leave him the very first night. It's too bad. Because it's your anniversary and I know you counted on having the whole crowd together——

(*Breaks off in desperation.*)

Oh, my goodness, I can't hear a thing! Wait a minute!

(*To Nettie.*)

Wait a minute!

NETTIE

(*Rising*)
Here, let me talk to her. I'll talk to her.
(*Goes to 'phone.*)

LIL

Wait a minute. She wants to talk to you.
(*Lil leaves the 'phone as Nettie takes it. At the same time Annie enters from passage. Annie has a grey woollen bed blanket in her arms.*)

TOGETHER

NETTIE

(*In telephone*)
Hello, Daisy! I'm terribly sorry, but we can't possibly—

ANNIE

What blankets do you want on his bed?

TOGETHER

NETTIE

—go out to-night. Fred's father's coming, and you know——

ANNIE

I say, what blankets do you want on his bed?

NETTIE

If it was any other——

ANNIE

I say, what——

NETTIE

What, Annie? Wait a minute, Daisy. What *is* it, Annie?

ANNIE

I'm making up his bed. What blankets do you want on it

(*Nettie turns to Annie. As she does so the audience can hear Daisy's voice in a flood of protest.*)

DAISY'S VOICE

If you and Fred don't come to-night I'll never forgive you. It's George's and my anniversary and you know it. Everybody else in the crowd is coming.

NETTIE

(*All the while talking to Annie*)

Take one of the spare ones packed away on the top shelf in the hall closet. You'd better take two. An old man. Fold up yours and we'll air them to-morrow on the line before we pack them away.

(*In 'phone.*)

I was just telling Annie about the blankets.

SIMULTANEOUSLY

ANNIE

Packed where?

NETTIE

(*Into 'phone*)

B l a n·k e t s—never mind. Nothing. I was just . . .

LIL

(*Talks across couch to Annie.*)

Mrs. Minick says to take one of the spare ones from the top shelf in the hall closet.

ANNIE

I got to get up on a chair.

LIL

(*To Annie*)

And did you hear the rest of it? To fold up yours and they'll be aired to-morrow.

DAISY'S VOICE

Now, listen, Nettie, you and Fred simply must come to-night.

NETTIE

Daisy, you know perfectly well I never miss one of the crowd's Saturday nights unless it's simply unavoidable.

DAISY'S VOICE

When's he coming—the old man?

ANNIE

To-morrow! What else all's going to be done to-morrow and it's Sunday!

(*Exits to passage.*)

NETTIE

I'm expecting him any minute now. Fred's bringing him up from the station.

(*Jim rings the doorbell.*)

LIL

I'll go.

(*Goes to outer hallway.*)

DAISY'S VOICE

Well, when Fred comes I want to talk to him. I think it's an outrage.

NETTIE

But, Daisy, you know I'm dying to go.

JIM

(*In hallway*)
Hello, there, kiddy!

NETTIE

(*An ear on the door*)
I've got to hang up now. Here's Jim! Well, call Fred later, Daisy. I've got to go now.

(*She hangs up as Jim and Lil enter from the hall, his arm around her shoulder.*)

She's awfully unreasonable about this, Lil.

JIM

What's the trouble?

NETTIE

Oh, hello, Jim! It's nothing! Daisy's so un-

reasonable. She ought to know that with Father Minick coming——

JIM

Hasn't got here yet, eh?

NETTIE

Fred's meeting him. They're due now.

JIM

Say, look here. I was thinking, Lil and I oughtn't to be here. You don't want a lot of people around when he comes.

NETTIE

Nonsense! It'll be nice to have things lively. He and Fred will have had their talk on the way up from the station.

LIL

Now, Net, don't hesitate if you'd rather——

NETTIE

No. Really. Marge and Al are coming in later, anyway. They'll pick you up.

JIM

(*Takes off his coat and hat and tosses them on hall chair.*)

Well, all right.

LIL

(*Goes to card table.*)

I suppose we might as well put these away, h'm?

(*Net and Lil make trips from card table to desk, putting away cards and papers.*)

NETTIE

We didn't get much done, did we?

JIM

My gosh! What's all that?

(*Picks up some papers from the card table. Lil takes them from him.*)

NETTIE

Don't mix them, whatever you do.

JIM

Club stuff again?

LIL

(*A trifle belligerently*)

Yes, it is.

JIM

What are you trying to do, anyhow? Fix the world?

LIL

Jim, even if you don't understand it, you must

admit that three thousand intelligent women banded together——

NETTIE

As a matter of fact, the Woman's Civic Aid numbers *over* three thousand.

JIM

All right. I'm not saying anything against it. Only I don't understand just what you're driving at.

NETTIE

We're trying to do a real welfare work. We're going to bring parents and children—especially foreign-born ones—closer together—at least my committee is.

(*Lil is at table.*)

LIL

We're giving a series of Saturday night get-togethers in the school houses.

(*Returns to desk.*)

NETTIE

Here are all these school houses lying idle every week-end. Now, why can't they be used for community gatherings?

(*Lil and Nettie finish placing the last neat pile of papers on the desk.*)

JIM

All right. But I could run Sears-Roebuck with less paper.

NETTIE

(*Giving him a quick glance*)
Why'd you say Sears-Roebuck?

JIM

Huh? Why, I don't know—I——

NETTIE

Now, Jim. If you and Fred are still thinking about that mail-order scheme——

LIL

After all Net and I've said!

JIM

Good heavens, no!

(*In the way he gesticulates and walks away you gather that he has been nagged a good deal on this.*)

NETTIE

Because Fred and I have been all over it and he knows the way I feel about it. I don't think either of you ought to give up good positions——

LIL

(*Faces him directly. Looks him in the eye.*)
Jim! You're *not* still thinking about it, are you?

JIM

(*Looks at clock.*)
No, I tell you! They're late, aren't they? Fred and——

LIL

Because if I thought you were!

JIM

(*Desperately*)
Lil, for God's sake!

(*Breaks off.*)
Suppose I 'phone down and see if the train's in. Maybe it's late.

(*Sits at desk.*)

NETTIE

I wish you would. They ought to be here.

JIM

What's he coming on? What road, I mean?

NETTIE

Chicago & Alton. From Bloomington.

JIM

(*Turning leaves of telephone book.*)
Bloomington, huh?

LIL

I suppose he's had his dinner?

NETTIE

Oh, he'll eat on the train, of course. Alton Limited—there's a diner.

JIM

(*With telephone book*)

Chicago—Chicago—Chicago Alton Railroad.

(*Nettie goes into dining room, gets glass of water and pours it over bowl of roses on table.*)

General and Executive offices—Division Accountant—Pullman Reservations—Lost Articles—Freight Traffic Department—Baggage Room—Inf—Here it is! Information!

(*Removes receiver.*)

Franklin 6700. . . .

NETTIE

(*In a half whisper to Lil, indicates Annie in rear of apartment.*)

I'm going to see what she's doing.

(*Tiptoes to passage doorway. Lil rises and follows her.*)

JIM

(*To Nettie*)

So the old gentleman's coming to live with you, huh? Quite an undertaking. Quite an—— Franklin 6700.

(*Nettie, who has been peering and listening at the passage door, from which she can see into the kitchen, turns, and speaks*

to Lil in pantomime, moving her lips. "I don't see her in the kitchen. I guess she's in her room.")

Huh?

LIL

Never mind, Jim.

NETTIE

(*Sotto voce to Lil*)

She's in there half the time, sitting down.

JIM

What's going on?

LIL

(*Nettie is back again.*)

Oh, never *mind!*

JIM

What's all the fussing about?

LIL

(*Irritated*)

Oh, Jim!

JIM

Well——

(*In 'phone.*)

Hello! Hello!

(*Turns again to Nettie.*)

How old is he, anyway?

NETTIE

What?

JIM

How old is the old gentleman?

NETTIE

Father Minick? He's seventy-one.

(*Considers.*)

Yes, seventy-one.

LIL

My! H'm.

JIM

Hello! Say, listen. They must answer, it's the Chicago & Alton Railway station.

(*To Nettie again.*)

Seventy-one, huh? Well, you know what the Bible says. Three score and ten.

NETTIE

I hope Father Minick will live to be with us for many, many years.

JIM

Sure. Sure. But we've all got to go some—Hello!

LIL

Well, Net, I hope it turns out all right. Of course, if it were an old lady it'd be different.

Laura Taylor's mother-in-law lives with them and putters around. Hems curtains, takes a hand in the cooking and fusses around her bedroom. But an old man with nothing to do!

JIM

Hello! Information! Hello!

(The sound of the outer door slamming. Fred's familiar whistle that always announces his homecoming.)

NETTIE

Here they are!

JIM

Oh!

(Hangs up receiver and rises. Fred enters, carrying Minick's bag.)

FRED

Hello! Here he is!

(Pops back into hall and draws Minick forward. Old Man Minick enters. He is smiling a little uncertainly, blinking a little what with the light and the strange faces that greet him; but he is jaunty enough.)

NETTIE

(Goes to Minick.)

Well, Father Minick!

(Kisses him.)

MINICK

I'm awfully glad to see you! How are you? All right?

MINICK

You bet!

(*Pinches her cheek.*)

You're looking pretty fine, Nettie!

NETTIE

Here—give me your coat. Fred, you know where the bag goes.

MINICK

Now, don't you wait on me. I can take care of myself, fine.

FRED

(*To Jim and Lil, who are standing back a bit.*)

Well, this is nice! Hello! H'are you!

(*Puts down Minick's bag, goes into hall to leave his hat and coat. He is smiling at the cordiality of Nettie's greeting to his father.*)

JIM AND LIL

Hello!

NETTIE

Father, this is Mr. and Mrs. Corey. Friends of ours.

LIL

How do you do, Mr. Minick?

JIM

H'are you!

NETTIE

Well, Father, take off your coat. You're going to stay a while, you know.

MINICK

(Starts to take off his coat, shunning her aid. Encounters Jim, who in turn has stepped forward to assist him. To Nettie.)

All right.

(To Jim.)

Never mind! I can do it!

(He takes off his coat unaided, tosses it and his hat on desk chair. Bringing his hands together with a clap he rubs them briskly. He's at home.)

Well! Certainly got a nice place here. H'm.

FRED

(Re-entering from hall.)

Like it?

NETTIE

Well, Father, are you tired from your trip?

MINICK

Me? No—takes more'n a train trip to tire me. Yes, *sir!*

(*Telephone rings; Fred answers it.*)

—more'n a train trip to tire me——

FRED

Hello! What? Why, no . . . I don't think —wait a minute.

(*To the others.*)

Does anybody want the Chicago & Alton?

JIM

No!

NETTIE

Oh, that was long ago.

FRED

(*In telephone*)

No!

(*Hangs up.*)

LIL

(*To Minick*)

I guess your train was a little late, wasn't it?

MINICK

Ma'am?

LIL

(*Loudly, in his ear*)

Wasn't your train a little late?

MINICK

Nope. Right on time. To the dot.

(*Nettie takes Minick's coat and hat from the chair and goes into hall with them.* (*Fred goes off into the passage with Minick's straw suit case.*)

About ten seconds late pulling into Pontiac, but made it up between there and Dwight. Pulled into Dwight at five forty-seven; pulled into Joliet at six forty-five; pulled into Halsted Street Station at seven-twenty sharp; pulled out of Halsted Street Station at——

NETTIE

(*Returning from hall. Takes his arm gently.*)

Now, Father. You'll want to see your room.

MINICK

(*Looking around room*)

All right, Nettie. A-a-a-all right! If it's half as nice as this, it'll certainly be nice. Yessir! You've certainly got it fixed up nice out here. Ver-y tasty! Yessir! I like a little more light, myself, but these lamps are all the go now, seems.

NETTIE

Come, Father.

MINICK

All right. Yessir! All the go since I was here——

(*To Lil.*)

I haven't been to Chicago since before Ma took sick. Used to come pretty regular.

LIL

(*Politely, and in the raised voice she reserves for the old.*)

Is that so? Quite a while, is it?

MINICK

Well, quite a while, yes. One—two—let's see.

(*Preparing for a long story, he turns desk chair to face them and sits there.*)

Ma took sick second week in August almost three years ago. August eleventh, it was. Complained of a pain right here. "Go to a doctor," I says. "Don't tell me about it! Go see Matthews," I said, "or have him come here." Had to talk to her like that. Rather suffer than go to a doctor. Scared. Well, finally, I got her to go. Come home talking kind of gay, and said Matthews said it was nothing, but I smelled a rat right away. Yessir. Minute I heard X-rays I said to Ma—"Ma," I said—"you can't fool me——"

JIM

Terrible thing, sickness.

MINICK

Anything but sickness, I always say. Any

other kind of trouble, yes. But you take sickness——

NETTIE

Now, Father Minick, come along. I want you to make yourself at home here.

MINICK

All right. Got some things in my trunk for you, Nettie. Ma's things. Tell you what else I got, too. You know that last picture she had taken, before she took sick? Well, I had an enlargement made—

(*Indicates its size.*)

that'll go right over your bookcase there, slick as anything.

(*Exits into passage, Nettie following.*) It's got a handsome gold frame on it, about four inches wide.

FRED

(*Enters from passage.*)

Isn't Dad a wonder for his age?

TOGETHER

LIL

Certainly is.

JIM

Fine old boy.

LIL

Do you think there is anything I can do for Nettie?

FRED

No, she'll be right in. There's nothing to do.
(*The clock strikes eight.*)

LIL

My! It's eight o'clock. Marge and Al ought to be here.

JIM

(*To Fred*)
I guess you and Nettie won't be able to get away, h'm?

FRED

Well, no. I'm afraid not to-night.

JIM

Still, he might turn in early. Even if you came a little late, why——

MINICK

(*Enters from passage, followed by Nettie.*)
Yessir! Very nice!
(*Goes to Fred.*)

FRED

Well, Dad!
(*Puts his hand on Minick's shoulder.*)

NETTIE

(*Sits on the couch and invites Minick to sit beside her.*)

Now, you sit down, Father, and have a nice visit with us.

LIL

Are you all fixed up, Mr. Minick?

(*Her voice is raised as though speaking to some one deaf.*)

MINICK

(*Raising his voice, imitating hers, in reproof.*)

Yes, ma'am——

(*Then whispers.*)

I am.

NETTIE

(*Hastily*)

I was just saying to Father Minick I wish we had a big front bedroom for him. I'd gladly give him ours, and we'd move back there, only that room's too small for twin beds and the dresser and Fred's chiffo-robe and all.

MINICK

That room's fine. Good enough for anybody.

NETTIE

You wait till I get the cretonne slips made.

And I'll have a little reading lamp for you and an easy chair.

MINICK

That's fine—fine! Just one thing I noticed, though. I wonder if you could spare me another pillow. You see, I sleep high, and if——

NETTIE

Why, of course. Now if there's anything else you want——

MINICK

No, no—everything's fine.

(About to seat himself in a very feminine looking silk chair, stops and feels the fabric appraisingly.)

I'll be out here most the time, anyway. H'm! Silk!

JIM

Well, sir, how do you think you're going to like little old Chicago?

MINICK

(Crosses his legs so that you see the soft-toed shoes and a goodly section of wrinkled brown sock.)

Chicago? I like Chicago first rate. Say, I knew Chicago before any of you young sprats were born. Why, you know where the Greenabaum Bank stands, Lasalle and Monroe——

FRED

LaSalle and Madison, Father.

MINICK

That's what I said. Why LaSalle Street wasn't anything, time I was your age. Wooden sidewalks and mud up to here.

(*Thrusts out one foot.*)

You could have bought that ground for a song.

FRED

I always say if anybody had been a good singer in 1875, he'd own Chicago now.

(*Sits on the couch beside Nettie.*)

MINICK

(*Bewildered*)

Singer?

NETTIE

Don't pay any attention to him, Father Minick. Fred's just trying to be funny.

MINICK

Singer? Oh, singer—you mean—say, that's a good one! Anybody'd been a good singer——

(*Laughs. Jim lights cigar which he has taken from his pocket.*)

JIM

(*Rising and going to Minick, taking*

another cigar from his vest pocket.)
Have a cigar, Mr. Minick?

MINICK

(*Takes it*)
Thanks.

JIM

Light?

MINICK

After supper. I never smoke before I eat.
(*Consternation on Nettie's face. One of those looks between her and Lil and between her and Fred.*)

NETTIE

You didn't eat on the train, Father?

MINICK

Never eat train food if I can help it. Don't like it, and anyway costs like all get out. Bread and butter extra. Piece of parsley on a platter, and where's your dollar?
(*Puts cigar in his pocket.*)

FRED

Why, Father, if I'd known we'd have stopped downtown.
(*Nettie rises.*)
Nettie——

NETTIE

I'll get you something right away.

LIL

Let me help.

NETTIE

Will you, Lil? I don't want to ask Annie.

MINICK

Now don't you girls fuss. Just anything you got in the house. Don't you bother for me.

(*Lil goes into the dining room and on into the kitchen.*)

NETTIE

(*Turning in dining-room door*)

I'm afraid there isn't much, Father. We had a kind of pick-up dinner, with Fred downtown.

MINICK

It's all right. I'm a light eater myself. Little soup. Cold meat, and a couple of eggs.

NETTIE

(*Rather feebly, as she exits*)

Ah—yes——

MINICK

(*Starts on a tour of inspection around the room.*)

Nettie certainly looks fine. Fine. I don't

know that I ever saw her look better. Handsome girl, Nettie.

(*Peers into hallway, and then turns—to Jim.*)

Your wife ain't bad looking. No, sir.

(*Drifts up to window. A smile between Jim and Fred.*)

JIM

(*To Fred*)

Well, what do you know?

FRED

Oh, nothing in particular. And you?

JIM

About the same.

(*Minick is peering out the window trying to see the lay of the land in the darkness outside.*)

MINICK

H'm! Trees out there?

FRED

That's the park, Father. Washington Park.

MINICK

Don't say!

JIM

I got some more figures to-day. Bradley——

(*Takes a card out of his pocket and hands it to Fred.*)

FRED

Yeh?

JIM

The kind of list we want would cost us close to five thousand.

FRED

(*A whistle of astonishment.*)
Phew! Steep!

MINICK

What floor'r we on?

FRED

(*Not turning*)
The second, Dad.

MINICK

H'm! Well!

JIM

Of course, I don't suppose we can ever really go ahead, with both the girls fighting us on it.

FRED

Nettie blows up every time I mention it.
(*Minick turns and edges over to them.*)

JIM

So does Lil. They began it to-night. Jumped on me, both of them.

FRED

You mean they brought it up?

JIM

I forget how it came up, but——

MINICK

(*He has lost interest in the window.*)
What are you two boys talking about? Business?

FRED

Oh, nothing in particular, Dad. I tell you, Jim, this is the time to start. Two or three houses have got it all to-day.

MINICK

What you going to do? New business?

FRED

Five years ago I'd have said no, but things are getting back to where they were before the war.

MINICK

Now, Fred, I don't want you risking a lot of

money in any new business. You got a good job, and let somebody else do the worrying.

FRED

Please, Father. We're not——

MINICK

That's all right. But you know the way you are. What kind of business is it, anyway? Something new-fangled?

FRED

No, Father. It's the mail-order business. Nothing to get excited about.

MINICK

Well, sir, you go careful. That don't strike me like anything for a couple of young fellows. Probably go to work and lose everything you got. And I'll tell you why.

(*Gets desk chair, puts it near them and sits.*)

What's your mail-order business depend on?

FRED

All right, Dad.

MINICK

(*Using the top of the open card table as a sort of map.*)

Depends on your little towns. All right, sir.

Take your little towns. Take Bloomington. There's a town set right down in the middle of the richest farming country in Illinois. And what's happened to her! Your farmer to-day is strapped. What's he getting for his wheat? What's he getting for his corn? And whose fault is it? I tell you till Europe gets on her feet we might just as well all mark time over here, and lucky we're not going backwards. A growing country like this has got to have outlets or where is she? You take any one of those countries over there to-day—you take Poland, you take Rooshia, you take Czecho—uh—take Roumania——

FRED

Oh, Father. We're only talking.

MINICK

Well, I've been through it and I know. If I'd waited a couple of years till things was more settled, I'd be a rich man to-day with that automobile tire.

FRED

But this is quite another thing, Dad. You don't understand.

MINICK

(*As Nettie enters from passage carrying tray, followed by Lil with lunch cloth.*)

It's a new business, ain't it? And you're talking about going into it?

NETTIE

(*Stops*)
Oh, is he? Well, there isn't going to be any new business, and don't you forget it!

FRED

All right!

LIL

(*As she crosses to the card table and lays the cloth.*)
The minute you two get together——

MINICK

(*Peering hungrily at the tray*)
That looks good.

NETTIE

(*Placing the tray on the card table*)
I brought it right in here, Father, so you can visit with us while you eat.

MINICK

Well, I didn't want you to go to any bother.
(*Picks up a dish.*)
What's this?

NETTIE

That's a little Waldorf salad, Father. We had it for supper.

MINICK

Waldorf salad, h'm? What's in it?
(*Stirs it a bit with a knife, as he stands.*)

NETTIE

Well, you try it and see. There's apples in it, and nuts, and mayonnaise.

LIL

It's delicious. I wish I were going to have some.
(*Old Man Minick's face doubts this.*)

NETTIE

Now, you sit right down, Father, and eat while things are hot.

MINICK

(*After an inclusive glance*)
What's hot?

NETTIE

(*Moving things on the tray a little*)
Well, your tea. And here's some nice warmed-up spinach.
(*Very little enthusiasm from Minick. He points again.*)

MINICK

What's that?

NETTIE

That's a coddled egg.

MINICK

Coddled?

NETTIE

It's good for you at this time of night. Gives you your calories and vitamines.

(*His look of bewilderment to Nettie and then to Lil shows that the words are meaningless.*)

FRED

(*Goes over to tray, looks it over.*)

Looks pretty good, all right.

(*Minick glances at Fred as if he doubts it.*)

MINICK

(*Tucks his napkin in.*)

Yessir! Fine! Fella couldn't ask for any better.

(*A pause. Begins to eat. He is a little noisy about it, especially with the more liquid portions of the meal. The coddled egg he brings up in its cup and sups it with a spoon.*)

Anybody else want a bite?

NETTIE

We've all eaten, Father.

MINICK

(*Over his shoulder*)

How about you, Corey?

JIM

No, thanks.

MINICK

Some nice spinach here going to waste.

NETTIE

Here's some cream for your cold rice pudding.
(*Handing it to him.*)

MINICK

I see it. I see it.
(*Returns it to table.*)
What do eggs bring in Chicago now?

NETTIE

It depends, Father. The best ones are very high.

MINICK

You give me a couple of days and I'll save you 20%. Where do you do your trading?

NETTIE

(*Visibly patient*)
On Fifty-first Street, Father.

MINICK

That's the reason. You watch me. I'll go down to South Water Street.

NETTIE

Don't you bother about that, Father Minick.
(*Minick takes a too-hasty mouthful, spills a spoonful of egg on his coat lapel and vest, is dismayed, wipes it hastily with his napkin, scratches at it with a knife, takes a furtive look around to see if they have noticed. They pretend not to have—all but Nettie.*)
Use a little water.
(*Minick dips his napkin in water glass, rubs the spots futilely.*)

MINICK

H'm—coddled, eh? Can't get your teeth into it.

LIL

It's good for you.

MINICK

Yes—I suppose so.—You young couples see a good deal of each other, do you?

NETTIE

Yes, we're very good friends, Father.
(*Lil pats her hand.*)

MINICK

I see. I see.
(*He eats. A pause.*)

MINICK

Come in to spend the evening, eh?

(*Eats.*)

Well, looks as if we could get up a pretty nice pinochle game some time—the three of us. What say?

FRED

We don't play that much in Chicago, Dad.

JIM

(*To Minick*)

It's a game I never learned, sir.

MINICK

Huh! What *do* you play?

LIL

We play bridge.

MINICK

Bridge, eh? Well, I guess I can pick it up.

NETTIE

(*With apprehension*)

It's a pretty difficult game, Father.

MINICK

M-m-m-m, a fellow that can play pinochle can play pretty much anything.

(*He surveys the now empty tray.*)

Well!

NETTIE

Have you had enough, Father?

(*He takes a sip of tea. Regards the cup doubtfully.*)

MINICK

Plenty, plenty. Besides, just as well to eat light this time of night.

(*Fishes in vest pocket for the cigar.*)

Read just the other day where a fella died from eating too much.

(*Puts cigar into his mouth. Fred crosses to Minick, taking a box of matches from his pocket.*)

FRED

(*Strikes a match*)

Here you are, Father.

(*Gives him the lighted match.*)

MINICK

(*Puffs with a loud putt-putting. Holds the cigar off contemplatively.*)

Yessir!

(*Throws match in teacup.*)

Died!

(*A pause here, with the others sitting about almost helplessly silent. There seems nothing to say. Nettie puts tea-cup on tray.*)

Well, what time do you folks go to bed?

FRED

This is a little early for us, Dad.

NETTIE

(*Re-arranging the dishes on the tray*)

If you're tired there's no reason why you shouldn't get your good night's sleep. Now, why don't you?

MINICK

Who? Me? I'm as wide awake as a whistle.

NETTIE

I just thought you might be tired. We have some friends coming in a little later.

MINICK

This time of night!

FRED

They're not going to stay.

MINICK

Then what they coming for?

LIL

They're stopping for us. We're going as soon as they come.

MINICK

Oh!

(*Looks expectantly at his watch. Nettie folds up napkin.*)

NETTIE

(*Rising. Picks up tray from table.*)
Lil, will you just fold the cloth up?
(*Lil comes down to the card table, starts to fold the cloth.*)

FRED

Why are you doing that? Where's Annie?

NETTIE

(*Holding tray.*)
Fred, she's had enough to do to-day without——

FRED

Nonsense!
(*Rises and crosses to passage door.*)
If I ran my office the way——
(*Calls.*)
Annie!

NETTIE

Now, Fred, I wish you wouldn't interfere when I'm——
(*She stops as Annie, a rather sinister figure by now, looms up in the passage door. Nettie turns, leaving Fred in charge of the field.*)

FRED

Would you mind clearing away that tray, Annie?

(*Annie goes to tray in silence, going between card table and couch. This brings her face to face with Minick, who looks up at her from his chair and smiles friendily. The others are far from smiling, especially Annie, whose face is grim to a degree. Annie rearranges the dishes preparatory to carrying the tray. This she does with unnecessary energy. Fred stands nearby, as one who intends to see his orders carried out.*)

NETTIE

(*With an assumption of graciousness she is far from feeling.*)

Annie, this is Mr. Minick's father, who is going to live with us. Father Minick, this is our Annie.

MINICK

H'are you, m'girl?

ANNIE

(*Surlily*)

H'are you?

NETTIE

We couldn't get along without Annie, could we, Annie? She makes us all comfortable, don't you, Annie?

(*Annie clatters a dish.*)

Oh, to-morrow, Annie—there's no reason why

you should come in early. You know, Mr. Minick and I always sleep late Sunday.

(*Remembers Minick.*)

Oh, Father, Fred and I are very lazy Sunday morning.

MINICK

Not me! I'm up and around six o'clock.

(*Annie gives him a hard look.*)

NETTIE

Oh, but Annie won't be here until——

MINICK

That's all right. I'll just stir around in the kitchen as quiet as a mouse.

(*Annie again looks at him menacingly.*)

Fix some coffee and toast and boil me an egg.

(*Annie picks up tray and starts toward the passage.*)

That's all I take, as a general thing.

(*Rises.*)

Maybe some cereal.

(*Annie turns with a glare, then continues toward passage. The door bell rings.*)

LIL

That's Marge and Al.

NETTIE

It's all right, Annie. I'll go.

(*Annie exits with tray.*)

FRED

(*He jerks the desk chair back to its place by the desk and begins to fold up the card table.*)

You'd think that girl was the last girl on earth.

NETTIE

(*As she crosses to hall*)

Well, a nice white girl doesn't like sleeping out.

LIL

And Nettie has never used coloured help. Once you begin you never can——

(*Fred puts card table back of chair at window. From the hall comes Al's voice —the voice of a professional back-slapper. Marge's voice is high, flat, shrill.*)

AL

(*Off*)

Everybody ready! The parade is starting!

MARGE

(*Off*)

Hello there, Net!

LIL

(*A glance at the clock.*)

Only twenty minutes late.

AL

(*Enters. Al's entrances always amount*

to an explosion. He bursts into the room.)

Well, citizens!

MARGE

Hello, boys and girls.

AL

AND citizenesses! Would appreciate a little round of welcome, and the keys to the old buffet!

(*Marge goes into hall and arranges her hair before mirror. Minick is standing apart, a trifle uncertainly, smiling a little. Things look lively and he anticipates some fun.*)

FRED

Hello, Al.

LIL

Well, I must say——

(*Jim waves a welcome.*)

AL

(*Crosses to Lil.*)

Oh, you kid! Remember—(*Sings*) "Papa loves mamma, mamma loves papa."

(*A little jazz step with this song, accompanied by finger-snapping. He gives a playful jerk to a ribbon on Lil's waist. Minick observes all this; gives a cackle of appreciation. Al has a trick of clapping*

his hands together and rubbing them briskly. It expresses, for him, geniality. This he now does. Marge enters, followed by Nettie. Marge is shrill, gay, "the life of the party.")

MARGE

Listen, we're not terribly late, are we?

LIL

Not any later than usual.

MARGE

Well, listen, we got started on time, honest to God, but Al had a——

AL

Lots of time. Shank of the evening, that's what it is!

(*Starts to chuck Nettie under the chin, but Marge stops him. He turns to Fred.*)

Shank of the evening! and a BIG night ahead! Wait till those little corks get to popping!

FRED

(*To Marge and Al*)

I don't think you've ever met my father. Father, this is Mr. and Mrs. Diamond.

(*Marge's greeting is too slight for utterance, so that one hears only "——do," as her glance slides past him. Al goes to Minick.*)

MARGE

Lil, my God, what do you think! You know that crêpe romaine I got at Vogue—Nettie, listen to this—

(*Nettie turns to her.*)

—I paid a hundred and seventy-five for it and what do I see this afternoon in Leschin's but the same dress down to the embroidery on the slip. I went right in and asked the price. I pret' nearly died when the girl told me. Ninety-eight fifty. Well, believe me, I marched right down to Vogue and gave them a piece of my mind they won't forget in a hurry. "Listen," I said—"what do you folks mean——"

AL

(*Speaks simultaneously with Marge, to Minick, having just been introduced.*)

Well, I certainly am glad to meet Fred's father. Anybody that's got Fred Minick for a son must be all right! I'll tell the world!

MINICK

(*Genial, if bewildered.*)

That's right! That's right!

AL

Yop! Fred's a grand fella—when he's sober.

(*A dig in Fred's ribs.*)

Well!

(*The noisy clap of the hands.*)

MINICK

Dinehart, d'you say the name was?

FRED

Diamond, Father.

AL

(*Stamping away, thumbs in his vest. He turns to Jim. Fred joins them, making a group of three men.*)

Diamond is right! And eighteen karats! Well, James, m'boy! How's the old universe been mistreating you?

MINICK

(*Attempts to join the group. More to himself than not, the others having turned away, leaving him again alone.*)

Oh, Diamond. I thought you said Dinehart. Because I used to know a fella named Dinehart in the paint business in Springfield. Paints and oils.

MARGE

(*Continuing*)

—by having the nerve to charge me one hundred and seventy-five dollars for a dress that I saw the exact same——

JIM

(*In answer to Al's last speech to him*)

Oh, can't complain.

AL

Oh, say, who do you think I wrote for twenty-five thousand iron boys this afternoon. Remember Sid Herman?

MINICK

(*In effort to get into conversation*)
Friend of yours?

AL

(*Goes on, paying no attention to Minick. He crosses and joins the women, followed by Fred and Jim. They make a compact group. Calls.*)
Lil!

LIL

What?

AL

Sid Herman—you knew him, too, Net. Ask Marge if she remembers him.

MINICK

(*Following along obligingly.*)
Do you?

MARGE

Oh, shut up, Al.

AL

I'll say she remembers him. Came within an

inch of hooking up with him, that's merely all.

(A clap of his hands and the brisk rubbing of palms. A shout of laughter goes up from crowd.)

JIM AND LIL

Oh-h-h, you Marge!

(Minick is vague as to what all the noise and banter means but is determined to be gay, too. In imitation of Al he claps his hands loudly together and rubs his palms briskly. He beams upon the group with his grin which by now has grown somewhat set. He expects some geniality in return, but no one is paying any attention to him. In the following scene the six young people form a close little group in which four, and frequently all six, are talking at the same time. The talk is disjointed, typical, noisy. Minick is definitely outside the group.)

AL

Well, how about it? Let's shake a leg! Hop on the old band-wagon, or forever after hold your peace!

JIM

What time is it?

AL

(*He "jazzes" this.*)
Starting time if we're going to where we're going to get to!

MARGE

Did Daisy and George 'phone?

NETTIE

Yes, Daisy called up a little while ago, but she wasn't sure where they were going.

LIL

Well, if Daisy doesn't know, who does? It's their party.

AL

Say, that's a fine note. Why, I saw George this afternoon and he said Keystone Club. The li'l' old Keystone Club.

JIM

Oh, what d'you want to drive way out there for? River Forest. Takes upwards of an hour and a half. Time you get back out there it'll be time to turn around and come back.

MARGE

I heard of a wonderful new place the other day. Listen, I heard of a wonderful new place the

other day. Bess Snyder told me about it. It's called the—oh, I don't know—it's out on—anyway, she says you can get practically anything you want and a wonderful cabaret——

(*Minick up to this time has maintained his company grin. But now he gives up. Decides to shift for himself. Turns.*)

LIL

I used to like Ike Bloom's place. I don't see why we have to drive way out of town.

AL

All right. We aim to please. That's our li'l' motto! Who's for the House That Jack Built?

JIM

Oh, say, that's miles out on the Milwaukee Avenue Road. Eleven before we get there.

MARGE

Well, suppose it is.

LIL

I thought we were going to some place in town.

JIM

Got to do a lot of detouring on the Milwaukee Avenue Road. Torn up.

AL

Well, let's get together. All together for the big show. In this tent ladies and gentlemen——

MARGE

Pete's sake, yes!

LIL

Well, I'll get my things.

(Al, with mock gallantry, helps her cross. Lil exits into the passage. The clock strikes half-past eight.)

AL

(A loud clap of the hands.)

All right, lads and lassie. Keystone Club it is. Peerade moves north on Cherry Street. Forward! March!

(Starts towards door prancing and singing. Al goes through group into the outer hall, followed by Marge and Jim. Jim puts his coat on. They go out of sight. Minick is by now up at the table on which stands a lamp. He is idly pulling the lamp chain, his head half turned towards the noisy group. He notices that something is wrong with one chain. It does not pull. Is stuck, apparently. He stoops slightly to peer at it.)

NETTIE

(To the group in the hall)

Well, good-bye.

FRED

Good-bye! Have a good time!

AL

(*Reappearing in the doorway and advancing a step into the room. Marge stands in the doorway. Jim is seen over her shoulder.*)

Whaddeyou mean, good-bye!

NETTIE

Fred and I aren't going, you know.

MARGE

Not going?

AL

Not going! You're crazy! Loony like a loon, that's what you are! *Why* aren't you going?

FRED

(*Low-voiced*)

We can't go to-night, Al.

AL

Why not, for Pete's sake!

(*Nettie gives a significant glance at the old man. Very loud.*)

Well for—! I'll soon fix that. Al W. Fixit—that's who I am.

NETTIE

No, no, Al.

FRED

(*In protest*)

Al!

AL

(*Waves them aside with a gesture of impatience. To Minick.*)

Heh, Papa! You don't care if they go out, do you?

MINICK

Huh?

AL

You don't care if Fred and Nettie breeze out awhile?

MINICK

Breeze?

FRED

Never mind, Dad.

AL

Yeh. With us. The crowd. You can take care of yourself, can't you, kid?

MINICK

Me? Why, sure I can. I'm no baby. I'm all right.

AL

There! What did Uncle Aleck tell you?

MINICK

(*Peering around at Fred and Nettie.*)
You going somewhere? Pretty late, ain't it?

FRED

Nettie and I aren't going, Dad. It's only the others.

NETTIE

We're going to stay home with you.

MINICK

Nobody has to stay home with me.
(*Nervously jerking the lamp chain.*)
I can take care of myself. Take care of myself fine. You go right along with your friends here and enjoy yourself. Yessir. Take care of myself fine. Nobody's got to stay with me. Nobody's got to——

(*He is a little startled by the whole proceedings and somewhat embarrassed by his own feelings. To conceal this he concentrates on the faulty lamp as though that were his chief concern.*)

This light don't work.

(*Minick quite suddenly turns and goes off*

into the passage just as Lil enters. She steps aside for him, senses the situation.)

LIL

(*She stands in passage door looking after Minick.*)
What's the matter?

FRED

Where's he——shouldn't I see if——
(*Looking after Minick.*)

NETTIE

It's all right, dear.

AL

'Course he's all right. No nurse needed for that old boy.

FRED

Well——

AL

Come on, people! Into your duds! This way for the big show!
(*Circling the group, he does a faun dance on his way to the door.*)

NETTIE

Al, we just can't go yet. Why don't you go on ahead and we'll follow, if we possibly can.

FRED

Yes, let's leave it at that.

MARGE

Oh, don't be silly. I never heard anything so old-fashioned in my life.

LIL

I think that'll be best. We know you'll come if you can.

FRED

You four go ahead. We'll catch up to you.

AL

Now, you're not going to backslide! Come one, come all—we want 'em all!

FRED

We have to wait till he goes to bed.

AL

All right!

(*A clap of his hands.*)

We're off!

(*Jim goes first, Marge next, then Al and Fred together, then Nettie and Lil together. As the whole group moves toward hall.*)

Now, get this earful! The bunch'll be at the li'l' old Congress.

Together

LIL

Well, how are you going to get down?

NETTIE

We'll take the L. It's quicker, anyhow.

MARGE

We'll wait until half-past nine. Half-past nine.

AL

And if there's any new dope we'll give you a buzz.

(*The group is out in hall, still talking. You hear Al saying:*)

Now, I'll ring you.

MARGE

Now, don't be foolish!

(*The stage is bare for an instant after they go, while the chatter of farewells and plans for meeting Fred and Nettie continue in the outer hall. Minick enters from the passage, carrying a hammer and a screw driver. His manner is businesslike and alert. He flings the hammer and screw driver on the table's polished top, rolls up his sleeves a little, stoops stiffly, removes the lamp shade, which rolls from the table to the couch.*

Peers closely to find the source of the trouble. He unscrews the light bulb, jerks the faulty chain a couple of times. Now he thinks he has found the source of the trouble. He settles to the job. Picking up the screw driver he adjusts it, then taps it firmly with the hammer.

The farewells in the hall have died down; have ceased. The outer door slams. Fred and Nettie re-enter.)

NETTIE

Father Minick! What are you doing?

MINICK

I'm fixing your lamp.

NETTIE

But you mustn't—Fred!

(*Appeals to her husband.*)

FRED

Don't bother, Dad. We'll have it fixed.

NETTIE

(*Picking up screw driver.*)

Father, where did you get——Fred, put the shade back on, will you, please?

MINICK

I'll do it.

NETTIE

No, Father. You sit down. Whatever made you——I've sent for the man to fix it.

MINICK

Man nothing! Glad to do it for you. Been fixing things all my life. Say, I can do more with a hammer and a couple of nails than most these fellas can with a whole tool chest.

NETTIE

Father, we have a man who does everything like that for us. A regular man. Now, I want you to promise me that you're not going to——

MINICK

No trouble. I like to putter around. A nail here, a nail there.

(*Fred is now putting bulb on lamp.*)

NETTIE

Oh——

(*Crosses to Minick and gets hammer. Turns desperately to her husband.*)

Fred!

(*Exits with hammer and screw driver into passage.*)

MINICK

What's the matter with her?

FRED

(*Replacing shade.*)

Nettie likes everything just so around the house.

MINICK

Wasn't hurting anything.

(*A little pause. Minick goes up to window and stands looking out—sulking a little.*)

Whyn't you and Nettie go along with the rest of 'em?

FRED

Well—we'll see.

(*Nettie re-enters.*)

MINICK

No sense in your staying around here. I'm going to bed anyhow. Going right away.

NETTIE

(*Alertly*)

Oh, are you?

FRED

(*Takes Minick's arm and attempts to manœuvre him into a chair.*)

No, he's not. Now, we're going to sit down here, the three of us, and have a good talk.

Photo by White Studio

FRED: "Dad, you know how awfully glad we are to have you here, don't you?"

MINICK

(*Still at window, facing away from them.*)
I'm not going to let you stay home with me. You got your evening planned out. Take care of m'self. I can take care of m'self fine.

FRED

(*Sits in armchair.*)
Well, we may go after awhile. Sit down. Tell us. How's everybody in Bloomington? Sit down, Nettie. Father, sit down.
(*Minick isn't deceived. He gives a quick look, pulls out his watch.*)

MINICK

I'm going to bed in two minutes.

NETTIE

(*Grasps at this*)
I'll hurry Annie up.
(*Goes to passage door.*)
Annie!
(*Aside.*)
The water's running— Annie! Are you almost finished?

ANNIE

(*Off*)
N'yeh!
(*Or nearly that. It is really a combination of yes and a snarl.*)

NETTIE

(*To Minick*)
She's nearly finished. Then you can go back.

FRED

Now, he's not going to bed yet—are you, Dad?

MINICK

Yes, I am. I want you to keep on just the same as if I wasn't here.

FRED

(*With obvious effort at conversation*)
Tell me, whatever become of that Brettschneider boy I used to run around with? Remember—I told you about him, Nettie. Whatever became of him, Dad?

MINICK

(*Strolling to Nettie's desk, peers with feigned interest into picture over it.*)
I was going to bed, anyhow. You folks run along.

FRED

Oh, now, Dad.

NETTIE

Well, now, maybe Father Minick does want to go to bed, Fred.

FRED

(*Hopefully*)
Well, if you're sure, Dad, that it's all right——

MINICK

'Course it's all right. You go right out and enjoy yourself.

NETTIE

I'll get my things on.

(*Goes quickly to the passage door and exits. Minick turns to the desk and jerks the lamp chain nervously.*)

FRED

(*His hands on Minick's shoulders*)
Dad, you know how awfully glad we are to have you here, don't you?

(*There comes a look in the old man's face unseen by Fred,—a look of something resembling terror. A piteous look. It says, "So this is what my old age has brought me."*)

MINICK

It's awfully nice of you and Nettie to do it. I guess I'm making a good deal of bother, coming in on you like this.

FRED

Why, Dad! Not a bit.

MINICK

I know. But you and Nettie got your own way of doing things. And—I know.

(*Nettie, her coat and hat on, comes into the dining room and turns out the light there.*)

FRED

(*With a hearty slap on the back*)

You don't know anything of the kind. It's going to be fine. You're going to like it and so are we. Aren't we, Nettie?

(*Nettie enters the room.*)

NETTIE

(*Puts out light in lamp by arm-chair.*)

What?

FRED

I was just telling Dad how happy we are to have him.

NETTIE

(*Goes to Minick and pats his hand.*)

Of course. We're awfully happy, Father Minick. And we want you to feel that this is your home and that what we want to do is to make you happy and comfortable.

MINICK

I'll be all right. I'll be all right. Don't you worry about me. You children go on, now.

(*He sits on the couch, takes "Vanity Fair" off the table and pretends to read.*)

NETTIE

Now is there anything you want, Father?

MINICK

I got everything I want. I'm fixed up.

(*Fred crosses to hall, gets his coat and hat.*)

NETTIE

(*Turns out desk lamp.*)

Annie's putting on her things now. She'll be out of your way in one minute. All right, Fred?

FRED

(*Comes back a few steps into the room.*)

Yes, I guess so. Now, you are all right, Dad? You know, I'd just as soon not go . . .

MINICK

(*With a wave of his hand*)

Shoo! O' course you go!

FRED

Well——

NETTIE

Well, good-night then, Father.

MINICK

Good-night—have a good time.

NETTIE

(*Crosses to him and kisses him.*)
See you in the morning. And you'll turn out the other lights in here, won't you? And just leave the hall light on. Don't forget.

FRED

(*Reluctant to go, turns at doorway.*)
Good-bye, Father. How about a nice walk to-morrow morning, you and I?

MINICK

Sure—we'll have big times.

NETTIE

Good-night.

(*Exits.*)

FRED

(*Lingeringly*)
Good-night.

(*Exits.*)

MINICK

Good-night.

(The outer door slams; the old man rises and throws down his magazine; he walks aimlessly toward the hall; then he turns toward the window, cups his eyes, and peers into the darkness outside in the hope of seeing them depart. He comes centre,

mutters to himself, "Well, sir!" starts toward table lamp and turns it out, then down to desk lamp, which he lights; sees card catalogue, sits in armchair and takes out a few cards, replacing them obviously in the wrong compartments. He takes off his boots, grateful for the relief. It has been a long day. His feet are tired. He wriggles them a little, patting the carpet with his grey-stockinged feet. This, somehow, reminds him of Al's little dance. With a little cackle of laughter he rises and attempts a rickety imitation of Al's performance, with its song, "Papa loves mama, mama loves papa." He tries Al's killing gesture of one hand at the heart. It is a little too much for him. He gives it up. Now he hears a little stir in the passage. He comes eagerly over and sees Annie emerging from the kitchen.)

Oh, hello!

ANNIE

Enters. She is carrying various brown-paper bundles, a battered suit-case, an alarm clock, her umbrella, and a wisp of yellowed palm, relic of a Palm Sunday long past. She is dressed for the street. In her cross from the passage door to the outer hallway she never stops.)

I'm going now.

MINICK

(*He gets behind and trots along right after her.*)

Forgot all about you being here. Been packing up your things, I suppose.

ANNIE

Yes. I'm goin' now.

MINICK

(*Sociably*)

Live far from here?

ANNIE

Yeh.

(*She keeps right on to the outer door.*)

MINICK

(*Following to hallway door*)

Take the L, do you? L's quicker than the surface car. Yessir!

(*The outer door slams. Annie is gone. He pretends he hasn't been rebuffed.*)

Much—quicker. I came up on the L——

(*Sadly, thoughtfully, to himself.*)

Yessir! I came up on the L.

(*There is, obviously, nothing left to do but to go to bed. He picks up his boots, remembers that he is to turn out a lamp, stoops stiffly to turn out the light at the side of the armchair. The small desk*

lamp is still lighted, but he has forgotten that. The lights in the outer hall and the passage illumine the room, but softly. In his stocking feet, carrying his boots, he walks across to the passage, up the passage, closes his door. The clock on the shelf above the bookcase strikes nine. A second's pause.

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE

The scene is the same as Act I. It is about six months later. A November afternoon. The time is about two-thirty. At the rise Lula, a negro maid, is just finishing a vigorous cleaning. Several pieces of furniture are still grouped together in the middle of the room; there are pails, mops, and cleaning rags. It is only the tail end of the cyclone that we are permitted to see. This is, however, no desultory dusting in progress. It is a sudden and desperate emergency cleaning, with Lula lunging about in heavy leaps and bounds, pulling a rug straight, tugging at a chair, stooping, shaking, pounding, straightening. As Lula is in the act of lifting some particularly big piece of furniture Minick enters from the passage. He is dressed for the house—and it is the attire of a semi-invalid who knows he is not going out again that day. He wears loose and comfortable bedroom slippers of the Romeo type, so that the bottom of his trousers are caught a little in the backs of the slippers, giving him that sloppy

look of the negligé male. Around his neck is an article that might be a muffler and might be a large coloured silk handkerchief. Whatever it is, it does not greatly add to his appearance. To make matters worse he has a heavy cold and has to sniffle now and then. On these occasions he pulls a huge handkerchief from his pocket.

MINICK

(*Stops about centre and peers into the hallway.*)

Thought I heard Nettie. Was it Nettie?

LULA

(*Not looking at him*)

No, sir.

(*Is breathlessly tugging at the heavy table.*)

MINICK

(*Disappointed*)

Oh!

(*Makes as though to help her.*)

Here!

(*His help is really a hindrance. Lula lunges down stage intent on another piece of furniture. Minick follows her, meaning to help again. He rather hopes it will be a big enough piece to require his help. But it isn't. Only a small chair,*

which she flings aside unaided. Now she heads for another, and again he eagerly follows, meaning to be of help. Again he is disappointed. Lula takes no notice of him. She works capably and with fury. He gives up his rôle of assistant. Takes out his watch—a huge silver one.)

MINICK

She'll be coming back soon, won't she?
(*Sniffles.*)

LULA

I s'pose so.

MINICK

What time'd she go?

LULA

(*She is not short with him, or snappish. Merely busy and intent on finishing her work.*)
I told you she went just before you come in.

MINICK

Then she ought to come back soon—
(*Sniffles.*)
—if she's going to get here.
(*This is in the tone of one who is looking for confirmation. Lula goes on about her work. Getting no reply, he goes on.*)

Yessir! Ought to come back soon. It's half-past two.

(*Lula now gathers up a pail and mop from among the brooms, dusters, carpet sweeper, etc., and turns to cross to the hall-way. As she does so Minick takes out his handkerchief hastily. Sneezes.*)

LULA

I told you you shouldn't have gone downtown this weather. Look at your cold!

(*Goes out.*)

MINICK

(*After a considerable pause, during which he stands looking after her.*)

Stay home for a little cold! Sick of staying home.

LULA

(*Re-enters briskly.*)

Going to keep you in the house another four days—that's what it is. Mrs. Minick she was awful mad when she discovered you gone out. Blamed me for it.

MINICK

Guess I'm old enough to know if I can go out or not.

LULA

Don't know no more'n a child. Have keep

after you like you was a baby. What you go out for anyway, feeling like you do?

MINICK

(*Very high-toned*)

I'll tell you something, m'girl. There may be some pretty important developments out of my going downtown this morning.

LULA

(*Unimpressed*)

Yah! 'Velopments!

MINICK

Some pret-ty important de-velopments. Yessir!

(*A figure of importance, at this moment Minick has to take a hasty side-step to avoid the handle of Lula's broom, which she has tucked under her arm in order to leave her hand free for the remaining utensils. The handle describes an arc which just misses him.*)

Yessir! And it may lead to far-reaching consequences. May take a good deal of business acumen to handle it. I'm not sure yet just what I'm going to do about it. There's several angles and I'm not sure which angle to take. That's why I want to see Nettie.

(*Lula here charges with a large chair, which she is pushing into place by sliding it along the floor. Her onslaught neces-*

sitates another quick side-step on the part of Minick, the big man of affairs.)

LULA

You better let her alone to-day. She's busy.

MINICK

That's all right. She'll listen to this. We've got to put our heads together. Yessir!

(*Lula has moved the smoking table from its accustomed place to a spot in front of the armchair; removes articles on it to bookcase and takes from the latter an elaborate gavel with silver inset.*)

LULA

I tell you you better not go bothering her to-day, with her meetin' on.

MINICK

Yeh—meeting! What's a meeting! If she's got a meeting what's she doing out so long for?

LULA

She had to go for sandwich stuff. I told you once. She didn't know she was going to have this meeting—

(*Blows on silver inset of gavel and polishes it, placing it on smoking table.*)

—till an hour ago. It was going to be over at some other lady's house.

(*Goes to the window to straighten a shade.*)

Wisht it'd stayed there.

MINICK

Well, don't seem to me much sense in holding a lot of women's meetings when—

(*Sees the gavel; picks it up.*)

—when there's things a million times—

(*Reads inscription on silver inset.*)

—more——

(*Lula is picking up her broom and carpet sweeper as the doorbell rings.*)

I'll let 'em in.

(*Puts down gavel with decision, and starts to door.*)

LULA

(*Stopping dead in her tracks.*)

You mean them friends of yours coming this house again to-day!

MINICK

(*Turning in hall door.*)

Like to know why not!

LULA

After me just cleanin' up and Mrs. Minick expectin' her meetin'? They been coming here three days hand-running.

MINICK

Entitled to have company, ain't I? Too cold to sit in the park.

(*The doorbell rings again. Minick starts into hallway.*)

LULA

Yah, company! What you do—sit around, talk your fool heads off!

(*Starts to go, then decides to wait and see who it is.*)

MINICK

(*Off*)
Gentlemen, come in!

DIETENHOFER

(*Off*)
Well, Minick, how are you?

PRICE

(*Off*)
Afternoon!

DIETENHOFER

(*Off*)
The cold any better?

MINICK

(*Off*)
I think it's breaking up. I was downtown this morning.

PRICE

(*Off*)
Bad weather to be out in.

(*Dietenhofer, a man of about Minick's age, comes into the room. He wears rubbers and overcoat, and still has his hat on. He is unwinding a long muffler. The voices of Minick and Price continue in the hallway.*)

DIETENHOFER

(*To the glaring Lula*)
Hello!

LULA

(*Pointing to his rubbers*)
I just clean this room and Mrs. Minick going to have a meeting.

DIETENHOFER

(*Looking down questioningly*)
Huh?

LULA

I say I wish you leave them rubbers in the hallway, day like this. Took me hour cleaning up after you yesterday!

DIETENHOFER

Oh!

(*He turns to go, just as Price enters, followed by Minick. Price is another old*

gentleman, wears overshoes, etc. He is struggling with his overcoat. Dietenhofer goes into the hall and removes his rubbers.)

LULA

(*Pointing to Price's feet*)
You got 'em on too.

MINICK

Yes, sir, I guess we won't sit out in the park much more this year.

(*Notices that Lula is pointing at Price's feet.*)
Now what's the matter?

LULA

I ask that other gentleman please leave his rubbers in the hallway.

MINICK

(*To Price*)
She's just cleaned up—sort of fussy.

(*Price nods, walks on his heels to a chair up in the corner and removes his coat and hat. Dietenhofer re-enters, rubbers off, and seeing Price removing his coat, starts to take his own off; he looks for a place to put his coat and selects the window seat.*)

LULA

All I got say is you wait till Mrs. Minick come back.

MINICK

That's all right.

LULA

She going to be awful mad, find you here to-day.
(*She departs for the back of the house.*)

PRICE

What did she say?

MINICK

Nettie's got some clubwomen coming or something, but we got lots of time.

PRICE

Sure—I got time.
(*He makes for an armchair.*)

DIETENHOFER

(*Taking out his pipe and heading for the sofa*)
Women are always doing something nowadays. My time they stayed home and tended to things.
(*Settles himself on the sofa.*)

PRICE

Not to-day. It's the unrest.
(*He too gets comfortable.*)

MINICK

(*Sits also, his feet on another chair.*)

Yep. Fixing this and fixing that.

(*Sniffles, takes out his handkerchief; Price takes off his rubbers and throws them into the hallway; Dietenhofer fills his pipe, shaking the tobacco out of the pouch and spilling a good deal on the carpet. With the manner of one opening a meeting:*)

Well, sir! What's the good word?

(*You gather that now they are settling down to business.*)

DIETENHOFER

Oh-o-o-h, about the same, I guess. Everything's about the same as yesterday. Yep! How's it with you?

(*Strikes a match and lights his pipe.*)

MINICK

Oh-oh-oh, not much different. How about you, Price?

PRICE

Oh-oh-oh, so so. Not much of one thing or the other.

(*Takes out his pipe.*)

MINICK

Anything new over to the Home to-day?

DIETENHOFER

No—nothing special. Nothing special.
(*Throws his burnt match under the sofa; Price now knocks his pipe bowl against smoking table, spilling the ashes on the carpet, then brings out a large clasp-knife from his pocket and opens it leisurely.*)
Not smoking, Minick?

MINICK

No. Don't taste like anything when you got a cold.

PRICE

How *is* your cold?

MINICK

Well, if the weather'd let up——

DIETENHOFER

Weather's pretty bad, all right.

MINICK

Yes, sir—regular November.
(*Sniffles.*)
It's November, all right.

DIETENHOFER

That's what.

MINICK

Yes, sir! It's November.

DIETENHOFER

Yep!

MINICK

Yessir!

(*Price grinds in his pipe with the knife.*)

Cut over through the park, did you?

(*Price has succeeded in loosening his pipe ashes; he looks around for a place to put them, sees a fancy vase on the bookcase, rises and gets it.*)

DIETENHOFER

Yah. Pretty wet, too.

MINICK

I was downtown this morning, though.

DIETENHOFER

You don't say? How was it?

MINICK

Bad. Yes, sir—bad.

(*Price clinks his pipe against the vase, then places it on the floor by his chair.*)

DIETENHOFER

(*Rising*)

Blackening up in the west again. Means more rain. What did I tell you this morning, Price? Watch the west, I says—that's where she comes from.

(*He takes Price up to the window.*)

MINICK

(*Joins them at the window.*)
Turn to snow, most likely. That's November for you.

(*Dietenhofer snaps up one window shade; Price goes to another window and snaps up its shade, which rolls around furiously.*)

DIETENHOFER

Ya—I guess you were right, Minick. Going to turn to snow. No more sitting out in the park this year.

MINICK

Well, we set out pretty late at that. October.

DIETENHOFER

October the 28th.

MINICK

Guess I set out too late. That's where I caught my cold.

DIETENHOFER

Well, a fellow can get a cold that way. Yep!

MINICK

I did, all right. Yessir!

PRICE

(*Who has been gazing out of window*)
Say—there's a right pretty girl going along.
(*The others look.*)

DIETENHOFER

That's right.

MINICK

Trim figure, too.

PRICE

She's stopping for something.

(*A pause.*)

No—she's going ahead.

DIETENHOFER

Stopping again.

PRICE

No. She's going.

MINICK

There she goes! Down the street. Down the street.

(*His voice takes on distance; Price returns to his chair.*)

Pretty busy street, all right. Lots of people go by. You know how many automobiles I counted in an hour yesterday! Two hundred and fifty-six! Sitting right there.

DIETENHOFER

(*Returning to the sofa; sits.*)

Wa-a-a-l, won't be so many from now on. Winter's coming on now, all right. Be May before we can sit out again. Yep!

MINICK

Yessir! May! May's a long time off. Pretty hard knowing what to do between now and then.

DIETENHOFER

That's right. Winter's a bad time.

MINICK

Yessir! With the park gone it's going to be pretty hard to fill in the time. I was thinking about it this morning.

PRICE

You got a nice place here.

(*Lights a cigar.*)

MINICK

Winter's a long time. Besides, generally folks in this room—company—one thing another. I've got my own room—but you can't do much of anything there.

DIETENHOFER

Oh, I don't know. There's always something to do.

MINICK

Well, of course, you can take a walk, but you got to walk pretty brisk, weather like this. Generally get a good nap after lunch, though. Then

—one thing another comes up. First thing you know, it's six o'clock, Fred comes home with the evening paper. Some news in *that,* as a rule. Then, after supper, I'm generally pretty tired, anyhow. Once in a while, though, Fred and I have a little game of dominoes before they go out.

DIETENHOFER

(*With a trace of meaning*)

The big room over to the Home is pretty nice in winter.

PRICE

Get your pinochle game there.

DIETENHOFER

That's what. Too bad they don't let visitors play over there, Minick. We got some pretty smart pinochle heads. Garvey—Henderson—Schultz——

PRICE

D'you know what Henderson held last night! A five hundred hand!

MINICK

Gosh!

DIETENHOFER

Only bid four-fifty on it.

MINICK

Probably picked up something.

PRICE

Just twenty.

(*Takes out his newspaper and starts to read.*)

DIETENHOFER

Yep! We have great times. They look out for your comfort over there pretty nice, Minick. They're paid to do it. Catch me going any place where I didn't pay my way.

MINICK

Well, I like to pay my way myself.

DIETENHOFER

They make you feel like somebody over to the Grant Home. A club, that's what it's like. A club. And may be a vacancy soon, too.

(*He eyes Minick narrowly.*)

Old Patterson's talking about going out to Los Angeles with a nephew or something.

PRICE

Expecting word any minute.

MINICK

No, sir! My son wouldn't hear of it. No, nor his wife, neither. Nettie wouldn't hear of it.

DIETENHOFER

I wouldn't live any other way. You're free. They got their rules, but outside of that you're free. You're never your own boss living the other way. Price here was through it. Weren't you, Price?

PRICE

(*Absorbed in the paper*)
What?

DIETENHOFER

You were living with your daughter before you come to the Home.

(*Turns to Minick.*)
Four children, she had.

PRICE

"Pa don't do this. Pa don't do that." Nossir!

DIETENHOFER

I've seen it. Seen it often.

PRICE

Errands. "Spool of white, No. 100." "Half a pint of double whippin' cream." "Ten cent loaf of gluten bread." And taking babies out wheelin' all the time.

DIETENHOFER

Hear all this talk nowadays about young folks. Old folks had some rights time I was a boy.

MINICK

Babies out wheelin'. Well, I guess that's one thing I won't ever have to do here. Blamed if I can understand what they're aiming at, these young people. I'm going to talk to Nettie about it—some day.

DIETENHOFER

Times are changing, that's all.

PRICE

It's the unrest.

MINICK

Club meetings. Worrying about other people's children, instead of having some of their own.

(*Rises and goes to the smoking table.*)

Club meetings, like the one she's got coming here to-day.

(*Takes the gavel, and hands it to Dietenhofer, who has risen.*)

Here it is—that'll show you.

DIETENHOFER

(*Reading inscription on silver plate*)

"Presented to Nettie B. Minick by her fellow members of the Home Relations Committee, Woman's Civic Aid, June 14, 1922."

(*Weighs the gavel in his hand.*)

Nice piece of wood, all right. Regular mahogany.

PRICE

Let me see it.

(*Gauges its weight in his hand.*)

More like teak. That's what it is—teakwood.

(*Minick takes it, weighs it, hands it to Dietenhofer who also weighs it skeptically.*)

DIETENHOFER

Well, maybe.

(*Uses the gavel to press the ashes in his pipe, returns to his seat and drops the gavel on sofa.*)

Heigh-ho!

(*Minick returns to his chair; there is a slight pause.*)

PRICE

(*Resuming his reading*)

I see where the sun's coming out to-morrow.

MINICK

That so?

PRICE

(*Reading*)

"Official Weather Forecast. Cloudy to-day; fresh northerly winds."

MINICK

(*Judicially*)

That's what they are.

PRICE

"To-morrow fair. Temperature yesterday: Highest, 43, 3:45 P. M.; lowest, 34, 9 A. M."

MINICK

(*Pulling out watch*)
It's five minutes to three now.

DIETENHOFER

(*Also takes out huge watch.*)
Seven minutes. There's a clock.

MINICK

(*Not even looking at it*)
Ain't going. I set mine this morning by the Wrigley Building. It's now exactly—
(*Waits for a second.*)
—four and a half minutes to three.

DIETENHOFER

No, sir—you're fast.

MINICK

I ain't had this watch in a repair shop in eight years. That's what I think of it.

DIETENHOFER

Well, you're fast, just the same.
(*Falls to puffing again; Minick sniffles; Price turns a page of the newspaper.*)

PRICE

(*Oracularly*)
"The World of Finance."

MINICK

How's it going?

PRICE

"Rails Stand Firm As Market Sags."

MINICK

Yeh? Well, I ain't bullish on rails.

DIETENHOFER

Market's been pretty good lately. A fella could have made a tidy sum just knowing what to go in to and when to go in to it.

MINICK

We-e-ell, I don't fool around with stocks, much. Rather have a nice piece of property than all your stocks and new-fangled businesses.

DIETENHOFER

N-n-n-yeh! Ties up your money.

MINICK

Well, better than putting it in some wildcat business and losing it.

(*Rises.*)

If I was so minded I could tell you two gentle-

men a case in point that I just found out about this morning. And I think it's a big mistake!

DIETENHOFER

What case was that?

MINICK

M-m-m-m—it's pretty confidential. But I don't know but what your advice might not be valuable. You're both business men of experience.

DIETENHOFER

I want you just to consider me at your service.

(*A large gesture. They shift a bit in their chairs, rather importantly.*)

MINICK

Well, sir! *It's* like this.

(*Takes desk chair and draws it over to Dietenhofer.*)

What do you gentlemen think of the mail-order business—as a business?

(*Price draws his chair over to them, dropping his paper on floor.*)

DIETENHOFER

Do you mean from the aspect of an investment?

MINICK

No, sir! I mean as a business to go into.

DIETENHOFER

Well, yes and no, is what I say.

PRICE

Somebody gone into it?

MINICK

Somebody! My son Fred, that's who!

DIETENHOFER

You don't say!

MINICK

Yessir! And I've got to stop him before it's too late!

PRICE

How far have things gone?

MINICK

Just started up, near's I can find out. Fred's never said boo about it around the house. Not even to Nettie, I don't think. She wouldn't 'a' let him do it, either.

DIETENHOFER

Tell us about it.

MINICK

Well, here I'd been cooped up in the house four days now. So this morning I got up, my cold was quite some better—Nettie was out do-

ing something—so I says to myself, I says, "I'll just jump on the L and go down and say hello to Fred." Freshen me up! So I goes down there. Big place full of desks and one of them smart Alecks asking you who do you want to see and have you got an appointment. I made short work of him. "Listen," I said, "I'm Fred Minick's father. Which one's his office?" By that time he looked pretty scared. And I'd of marched right in, too, only he says, pretty wilty by now, "Mr. Minick ain't in," he says. "He's over at his other place." Well, at that I smelled a rat right away. "Oh," I says, "he is, is he?" And this young sprat says, "Yes, he's always over there mornings." I never let on. "That's so!" I says. "Let's see, now. That number's two sixty—uh——" "It's the Monadnock Building," the kid says. "I don't know the number."

PRICE

Good work!

DIETENHOFER

Did you find it?

MINICK

(*A gesture that means "Leave it to me!"*)

Marched right up to the elevator fella and says, "Party name of Minick got offices here?" "Eleven-seventeen," he says.

(*Imitates the man's tone.*)

And sure enough, there it was painted on the

door: "Twentieth Century Mail-Order Company." And down underneath, "Frederick Minick—James J. Corey!" That's a friend of his.

PRICE

Two of them!

DIETENHOFER

Did you go in?

MINICK

Had my hand on the door when I says to myself, "No! I want to see Nettie first about this." Fred's a funny boy. Got to handle him just so. Ever since he was a youngster. So! That's the situation in a nutshell, gentlemen, and I would certainly appreciate having your advice.

DIETENHOFER

Well, now that you've laid all the facts before me—I don't know. But I will say this, here and now. You take two young fellas, inexperienced——

(*Nettie's key is heard in the outer door. Minick hastily motions to Dietenhofer to be silent.*)

MINICK

Here's Nettie now.

(*Nettie enters carrying two bundles, one a loaf of bread, the other a smaller bundle.*)

MINICK

(*Elaborately casual*)

Hello, Nettie!

(*Nettie stops short as she sees the old men. A quick look takes in the disorder of the room. Two are still puffing their pipes. Newspapers are scattered all about. The window shades are awry; chairs are pulled out of place; cushions rumpled; the gavel and the vase on the floor; ashes on the carpet; muddy foot-prints.*

NETTIE

Oh, Father! What are you——! I told you not——

(*Her look and gesture express more than her words. Picks up vase and puts it on bookcase.*)

MINICK

(*Explaining*)

Well, Mr. Dietenhofer and——

NETTIE

It was all right yesterday, and—but——

(*Picks up newspapers and goes toward passage.*)

DIETENHOFER

We only came in to keep Mr. Minick——

NETTIE

Lula! Lula!

(*Turns to the old men.*)

Of course I was glad to have you sit with Father Minick this week, but to-day——

(*Lula enters from the passage.*)

Lula, take these!

(*Stuffs newspapers into her hands.*)

No, wait a minute!

(*Gives her the two bundles.*)

That's for the sandwiches—and hurry! I'm terribly late—I thought I'd never get——

(*As Lulu goes.*)

And bring in the dustpan and whisk broom!

(*During the next few speeches Nettie is flying about the room in a desperate effort to set it to rights before her guests arrive; takes gavel from sofa and replaces it on smoking table.*)

Of course I know it's been hard on you, Father, being in—but just to-day——

(*Pulls armchair into place.*)

So inconvenient—my whole committee—— Come to-morrow—come Thursday—come any other day! I'd be only too glad——

(*Takes desk chair and replaces it; goes around the old men to the table, they turn completely around watching her; she hands Dietenhofer his hat.*)

Father, I *did* tell you I had some women coming to-day, didn't I!

MINICK

Well, well! Nothing to fuss about!

NETTIE

Nothing to fuss about! Look at this room! Lula!

DIETENHOFER

Well, ma'am, I assure you we've got our own place to go to——

NETTIE

Lula!

PRICE

Maybe you want us to go.

(*Lula enters from the passage, carrying dustpan and whisk broom.*)

NETTIE

Here! Give me those! You go ahead with the sand——Why, you haven't your uniform on!

LULA

Haven't had time yet. I been——

NETTIE

Well, go ahead! Don't talk! It's after three now!

(*Lula goes. Nettie calls after her.*)

And don't forget to cut them very thin!

(*Kneels with dustpan and whisk broom in front of sofa.*)

MINICK

I'll do that for you.

NETTIE

No, Father. You can help your friends on with their things.

DIETENHOFER

It's all right. Don't trouble yourself. We can put them on.

MINICK

(*Eagerness in his tone*)
Coming around again to-morrow? I'll be here.

DIETENHOFER

Well, we'll be pretty busy to-morrow.
(*Gets his coat.*)

MINICK

Well——

NETTIE

(*Whisking up ashes*)
And another thing! I was furious when I came home and found you were out. You weren't fit to go out.

MINICK

Well, it's a good stroke I went. I want to talk to you.
(*Sniffles.*)

NETTIE

Well, you see what's happened—your cold's worse.

(*Brushing at Price's feet.*)

Your coat's up there, Mr.—uh——

PRICE

Huh? Oh!

(*Moves at last to get it; he and Dietenhofer struggle with their coats and mufflers.*)

NETTIE

Lula! Lula!

(*Goes into passage with broom and pan.*)

DIETENHOFER

(*To Minick*)

Pretty high strung, ain't she?

MINICK

Oh, she don't mean anything.

DIETENHOFER

Well—they don't ever mean anything, but—just the same——

PRICE

I had it.

DIETENHOFER

You mull it over in your mind just in case that vacancy does happen to——

NETTIE

(*Re-entering*)
Are you all ready?

DIETENHOFER

Well, ma'am, I wish you good-day.
(*Extends his hand.*)

NETTIE

Good-bye.
(*Is compelled to take his hand; otherwise he won't go.*)

PRICE

(*Also extending his hand*)
Good-bye.
(*She takes his hand; Dietenhofer crosses to the door.*)

NETTIE

Good-bye. Father, would you mind bringing in a few chairs from the dining room?
(*Minick starts for the dining room; Nettie quickly adds:*)
After you've seen your friends out.

DIETENHOFER

(*Stops; considers*)
Where did I put my rubbers?

NETTIE

They're not in here. Perhaps you can put them on outside.

DIETENHOFER

I know. They're in the hall.

PRICE

That's so—they are.

(*They go into the hallway.*)

NETTIE

(*Crossing to the window, where she starts to straighten the shades.*)

Father, you will get them out of here, won't you?

MINICK

What do you think I found out this morning?

NETTIE

I don't know, Father. Tell me later.

MINICK

What do you think Fred's done?

(*You hear the noise of the old men stamping into their rubbers.*)

NETTIE

Please, Father. The meeting'll be starting.

MINICK

Fred's gone into the business.

NETTIE

(*Turns quickly*)

What! How do you know? Mail-order!

MINICK

Yessir! And you and I got to stop him!

NETTIE

But how do you know he's gone into it? Who told you?

MINICK

Saw it on the door. Fred and Mr. Corey.

NETTIE

Where? What door?

MINICK

1117 Monadnock Building. What'll we do!

NETTIE

Monadnock Building—father, tell me something. Did you——

DIETENHOFER

(*Re-entering*)
Well, we're going.

PRICE

(*Re-entering; looks about*)
Where's my newspaper?

NETTIE

What?

PRICE

I want my newspaper.

Photo by White Studio

MINICK: "Yes, sir! And you and I got to think of some way to stop him!"

NETTIE

What newspaper?

PRICE

My newspaper. Left it right here some place.

NETTIE

Oh, please! Can't you get another newspaper!

PRICE

Get another? Only had this one an hour!

NETTIE

(*Almost beside herself, going near passage*)
Lula! Lula!

MINICK

I'll get it.

NETTIE

No, Father, keep out of the kitchen!
(*Lula, who has changed to her black dress, appears in passage door.*)

LULA

Huh?

NETTIE

Lula, get that newspaper I just——

(*The doorbell rings. Her arms go out in a gesture to the heavens. She turns to Minick.*)

Now there you are! Lula, answer the door! It's them. No—wait! Get your apron on!

(*Lula vanishes into passage; Nettie turns and sees that Price is standing immovable.*)

Oh, I'll get your paper!

(*To Minick.*)

You've got me just all unstrung!

(*Dashes off into passage.*)

(*Dietenhofer discovers something the matter with one of his rubbers and finds that he must sit down to fix it. Price sits on sofa. Lula, fastening her apron, enters and crosses. She discovers that the apron is wrong side out; reverses it; exits into hall. Nettie rushes in from passage carrying Price's crumpled newspaper. Stuffs it under his arm.*)

NETTIE

(*Peers into the hall to see who are coming.*)

And now if you——

(*Sees Dietenhofer is seated again.*)

Good heavens!

(*Dietenhofer rises; Nettie moves the chair.*)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

(*Heard as the door opens:*)
Good afternoon!

NETTIE

Now, Father, you see—here they are!
(*To the others.*)
Now you *are* going right out, aren't you?
(*Price and Dietenhofer make for the hall, but of course it is too late. Mrs. Smallridge and Miss Crackenwald enter. Miss Crackenwald is a spare and middle-aged spinster, rather hawk-faced and acid. One of those capable persons. Mrs. Smallridge is rotund, friendly, matronly. Lula follows them on.*)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Good afternoon! Well! Are we the first?

NETTIE

How are you, Mrs. Smallridge! Miss Crackenwald!

MISS CRACKENWALD

(*Very crisp*)
Afternoon.

NETTIE

Lula, take the ladies' things.
(*The old men are edging toward the*

door when Mrs. Smallridge, beaming, addresses Minick.)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Well, Mr. Minick! And how are you these dull November days!

(*She has a trick of laughing a nervous mirthless semi-laugh at the end of her sentences, followed by an intaking of the breath which is very annoying to the listener. Her intention is kindly, always. Too kindly.*)

Manage to keep happy? That's good.

(*Lula has taken Miss Crackenwald's coat.*)

MISS CRACKENWALD

I'll keep my hat on.

(*Lula goes to Mrs. Smallridge.*)

MINICK

Oh, I manage.

(*Turns to the men.*)

Well!

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

(*In the tone of one addressing a small boy:*)

I suppose these are friends of yours come to while away a rainy afternoon. I remember when Mr. Smallridge's poor dear father was with us, how he loved to have his friends in. My! Bright and active right up to the last day.

MINICK

(*Expanding a little*)
Yes. Yessir! I'd like you to meet these gentlemen. . . . Mr. Eugene Dietenhofer—Mrs.—uh——

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

(*Prompts him*)
Mrs. Smallridge.
(*One of her indrawn laughs.*)

MINICK

And Mr. J. W. Price.

DIETENHOFER

Pleased to meet you.

PRICE

Pleased to make your acquaintance.
(*Nettie is politely dying in the background.*)

MINICK

(*Not wishing to ignore the other guest*)
And this is Mrs. ? . . .

MISS CRACKENWALD

(*Solid ice*)
Miss Crackenwald.

MINICK

Miss?

NETTIE

Father!

(*To the others.*)

These gentlemen were just going.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Well, I hope we aren't chasing you away. Bundle up good and warm. It's very penetrating out.

(*At this point Miss Crackenwald turns stiffly away and paces up and down, weighty affairs of her own on her mind.*)

PRICE

(*Throws back his coat. Displays a maroon sweater with a great white C embroidered on it.*)

Never fear. Got m' grandson's sweater on.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

That's wise. You know Lake Michigan in November.

DIETENHOFER

(*Catches Miss Crackenwald's eye.*)

I always wear a good piece of old-fashioned flannel right inside my underwear.

(*Unbuttons part of his shirt to show this in triumph. Miss Crackenwald's eyebrows go up slightly.*)

NETTIE

I'm afraid I must ask you to go now. The meeting is going to get under way.

DIETENHOFER

Well, good-bye.

(*Starts off.*)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Good-bye.

PRICE

Well, I hope——

(*He never finishes; Nettie propels him out; Dietenhofer and Price go into the hall; Minick takes them to the door.*

Nettie turns to Miss Crackenwald with a little semi-exclamation of apology and relief.)

NETTIE

Well—won't you sit down?

MISS CRACKENWALD

(*Glances at her wrist watch, crosses to the sofa and sits stiffly on the edge.*)

After three. Do they all know the meeting's been shifted here?

NETTIE

I notified them.

(*The doorbell rings.*)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Clara Whitney took sick very suddenly, didn't she? This flu. Do you know, I remarked the last time I saw her——

LIL

(*Looks in from hall*)
Hello, Net!

NETTIE

Hello, Lil! Lula!
(*Beckons Lula to take Lil's wraps. Lil enters; Nettie sits.*)

LIL

How do you do, ladies?
(*A meaning look toward the hall and then to Nettie.*)
I see you've been entertaining.
(*Lula crosses and goes off. Lil sits.*)

NETTIE

Yes. I—I hope no one's been inconvenienced by the change in plans.

MINICK

(*Re-enters from hall and starts to sit.*)
Well! Starting to gather, huh?

NETTIE

(*Checking him with her words*)
Father, you were going to bring in the chairs.

MINICK

All right. All right.

(*As he goes to the dining room:*)

What's the meeting about? Something important?

(*He goes into the dining room.*)

SIMULTANEOUSLY

MISS CRACKENWALD

I don't see why people can't be on time. I was here on time and I've had a very full calendar to-day. And my head is simply splitting.

NETTIE

(*Sotto voce to Lil*)

Lil, I must talk to you.

LIL

What's the matter?

NETTIE

(*Rising*)

I'm so sorry. Why don't you take your hat off and be comfortable? Go right back into my room. You'll find everything. Lula!

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

I'll show her.

(*Rising:*)

Don't bother Lula. I know how it is. Why don't you take an asperin, Miss Crackenwald?

MISS CRACKENWALD

(*Following her: stonily*)

I've had six.

(*They both disappear into the passage. Minick enters from the dining room with two chairs and places them in front of the sofa.*)

NETTIE

(*Crossing to Lil*)
Did you know the boys were in business?
(*Minick listens, chair in hand.*)

LIL

Business?

MINICK

What are you going to do about it?

NETTIE

(*Silences him with a gesture*)
Did you know that Fred and Jim had gone ahead with that crazy mail-order scheme?

LIL

They haven't!

NETTIE

They have!

LIL

I don't believe it! How do you know?

MINICK

I found it out——

NETTIE

Father Minick! Monadnock Building! Saw it on the door!

LIL

What are you talking about?

NETTIE

I'm telling you that Fred has probably taken every penny we've got in the world—

(*The doorbell rings.*)

—and dumped it into this—this idiotic——

MINICK

Yessir!

LIL

Then Jim has too. Net, if he has——

(*Mrs. Smallridge and Miss Crackenwald return, talking. Lula follows them on, crosses and exits into hallway.*)

MISS CRACKENWALD

(*Talking as she enters*)

. . . in view of the rather exhaustive survey——Still nobody else here?

NETTIE

(*Following Lula into the hall*)

Here is some one now.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

(*To Minick*)
Helping to do your bit, I see.

MINICK

That's two. Got two more.
(*Goes back to dining room, as Mrs. Lippincott and Miss Stack enter from the hall; Lula takes their coats.*)

Mrs. Lippincott is a general. Hers is the executive mind. She thinks nationally. Her dream is an office in the National Federation of Women's Clubs. A woman of about forty-eight. She plays a crafty game. Runs to plumes.

Miss Stack is a sycophant. She lobbies for Mrs. Lippincott. About ten years younger than her leader. A bit shabby.

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

How do you do, ladies!

MISS STACK

How-do!
(*The other women return the greeting. Nettie brings several stacks of papers from the desk to the presiding table.*)

MISS CRACKENWALD

We've been holding the meeting for you.

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

I think you know, Miss Crackenwald, that if there's one thing I pride myself on, it's punctuality. Miss Stack and I had to go to Clara Whitney's to learn that the meeting had been transferred here.

MISS STACK

Mrs. Minick seems to have forgotten to notify us.

NETTIE

But I did! I left messages at both your homes. I spent the morning telephoning.

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

That's strange. My secretary is generally very reliable.

(*Minick returns with two more chairs.*)

MISS CRACKENWALD

I don't think we should wait for the rest.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Yes—let's begin.

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

I don't know why we couldn't have met at my house, as long as Clara Whitney was sick.

NETTIE

Shall we start now?

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

(*Coldly*)

How can we start without a quorum, Mrs. Minick?

NETTIE

That's true. We haven't, have we?

MISS STACK

We have only six. Seven is a quorum.

LIL

Well, now I know Marge Diamond is coming. I spoke to her this morning. Can't we sort of kind of start, meanwhile?

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

I don't think it would hurt, this once. We don't have to be so strict. I move that we go ahead and start.

LIL

I second the motion.

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

You can't introduce a motion until the meeting's called to order.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

(*Bewildered*)

Then how are we going to start?

(*Minick has followed all this with breath-*

less interest, his glance leaping from one face to the other as the talk progresses.)

NETTIE

What is your pleasure, ladies, in this matter? Mrs. Diamond is coming eventually.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Isn't there some way we can start?

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

We could, under Section Five, Article Eight, suspend the rules with the unanimous consent of the assemblage.

(*Miss Crackenwald sits. From two of three of those assembled: "All right," "Yes." "Well, why don't we?"*)

MINICK

What's the meeting going to be about, anyway?

(*They all look at him. A look from Nettie to Lil that says, "Help me!" A little buzz of conversation in the group.*)

NETTIE

Thanks for bringing in the chairs, Father.

(*A gesture that tries to dismiss him.*)

MINICK

That's all right, Nettie, my girl.

LIL

(*Goes to him.*)
Now, Mr. Minick, you don't want to stay and listen to a lot of dull business, do you? Why don't you take a nap?

MINICK

Just got up. Don't want to sleep my life away.

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

(*Sits*)
I think we can begin now, Madame Chairman!
(*Miss Stack sits beside Mrs. Lippincott.*)

NETTIE

I shall call the meeting in a moment, Mrs. Lippincott.
(*Goes to Minick.*)

MISS CRACKENWALD

It's getting later and later.

NETTIE

(*To Minick, in an undertone*)
Father, you don't want to stay here, do you?

MINICK

I like it here.

NETTIE

You'll have to be very quiet.

MINICK

I will. Quiet as a mouse.

(*Goes to an easy chair, far removed from the centre of things, and sits.*)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

(*To Miss Stack*)

This is a pretty room, isn't it? With the park and all.

MISS STACK

Y-yes.

(*It seems easier to agree.*)

NETTIE

(*Taps three times with the gavel.*)

Ladies!

(*They are all attention.*)

The meeting will please come to order. The—uh—first business of the day is the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting.

(*Drops into sudden informality.*)

Oh, Marge isn't here.

MISS CRACKENWALD

Why *she* was ever made secretary!

NETTIE

We can defer the reading of the minutes until Mrs. Diamond gets here. Is there any unfinished business?

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

(*Leaps to her feet.*)
Madam Chairman!

NETTIE

Mrs. Lippincott?

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

I call for the orders of the day. I believe the chair is in error.

NETTIE

Oh!

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

Failing the reading of the minutes the next business is the Reports of Boards and Standing Committees, followed by Reports of Special Select Committees and Special Orders. Then, and not until then, comes Unfinished Business.

NETTIE

The Chair stands corrected.

(*Mrs. Lippincott sits.*)

MINICK

(*Impressed*)
Gosh!

(*Every head turns toward him.*)

NETTIE

(*Consulting a paper*)
We'll have the sub-committee reports. The sub-committee on Playgrounds——

(*Her voice drops from its official note to an everyday tone.*)

Oh, that's Clara Whitney, and of course she's sick. . . . Well, then, the report of the subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency——

(*Her voice drops again.*)

Now I talked to Emma Osgood over the 'phone this morning and she said she'd positively be here. Of course she lives way over north.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Tries to do too much.

MISS STACK

(*Searching among her papers*)

Mrs. Osgood asked me to say that she will submit her Juvenile Delinquency report at the next meeting——

(*Rises.*)

She has had some difficulty in verifying her statistics on—

(*Referring to her paper*)

Group C, boys of fifteen and sixteen.

NETTIE

Oh—well—thank you.

(*Miss Stack sits.*)

MINICK

(*Rises and takes a step down.*)

Say, I'll tell you a good one on Fred time he was fifteen! He——

NETTIE

(*Her finger to her lips, recalling his promise to be quiet.*)
Father, remember you——

MINICK

That's right. That's right.

(*Sits.*)

NETTIE

Well—"sub-committee on Home Survey"—anyway, you're here, Miss Crackenwald.

MISS CRACKENWALD

I am.

NETTIE

(*A little buzz of talk has broken out.*)
Ladies! We will now listen to——

MISS CRACKENWALD

(*Rising and clipping a tremendous pair of eyeglasses on to her nose.*)
Madam Chairman—I was asked——
(*The telephone rings. Miss Crackenwald pauses.*)

NETTIE

I'm awfully sorry.
(*Minick half rises to answer. Nettie waves him back.*)

Never mind, Father.

(*Goes to telephone.*)

Hello! . . .

A Woman's Voice

Is this Drexel 4269?

Nettie

Yes!

Voice

Is Mrs. Diamond there?

Nettie

No, Mrs. Diamond's not here. We're waiting for her ourselves.

Mrs. Lippincott

(*Aside, to Miss Stack*)

We're not getting anything done.

Voice

What?

Nettie

I say we're waiting for her ourselves.

Voice

Well, the minute she comes in tell her to call up her home. It's important.

Nettie

Her home? Don't you know where she is?

VOICE

She expected to go to your house.

NETTIE

(*Annoyed*)

All right. I'll tell her to call you.

(*Hangs up. Comes back to her chair.*)

I'm so sorry. For Marge, of course.

(*There is a little buzz of talk. The meeting has become slightly disorganised. Nettie again raps for order.*)

Ladies! The meeting will come to order.

MISS CRACKENWALD

(*She has quite a sheaf of papers in her hands. As she begins to speak, and during her opening sentence, she is intent on these papers, shifting them, glancing through them, rearranging them.*)

I was asked, on August the tenth of the current year, to undertake a survey of some of the homes in the districts where conditions—

(*Lula appears in doorway. She is flying distress signals. She beckons to Nettie, pantomiming meanwhile. Nettie shakes her head in negation and tries to make Lula vanish with a glance. Lula persists.*)

—demand attention, with a view to evolving a new plan for establishing between parents and children that bond which is so necessary if we are to develop a real American citizenry in the gener-

ation now flowering into manhood and womanhood. Accordingly, on the morning of the sixteenth of August——

(Here she notices that she has lost her audience. One by one they have been turning as they caught the sibilant sounds from Lula, and noted Nettie's pantomimic response. Miss Crackenwald looks over her shoulder, annoyed.

Lil has risen and has joined in the pantomime in an effort to shoo Lula off. Lula is insistent. The interruption is now a definite one. Obviously it demands Nettie's attention. Lula is hissing "I got to see you about the sandwiches . . . sandwiches" . . . You catch the word in all its sibilance, "sandwiches!")

MINICK

(To Nettie)
Lula wants to talk to you.

NETTIE

(Rises and crosses, defeated.)
I'm terribly sorry, everybody. I won't be a second . . . Lula, what do you mean——

(Lula exits, followed by Nettie, who slams the door. An embarrassed silence.)

MISS STACK

The meeting should have been at your house, Mrs. Lippincott.

LIL

Well, you know Nettie has had a great deal to put up with to-day, Miss Stack.

MISS CRACKENWALD

I might as well sit down.

(*Does so.*)

MINICK

(*Rises and comes down to Mrs. Lippincott.*)

Well! Kind of a recess, eh? I'm Fred's father. I don't think I caught your name.

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

Mrs. Thornton Lippincott.

(*She turns away.*)

MINICK

Well, anyway, about Fred. I was going to tell you——

NETTIE

(*Re-enters flustered, apologetic, almost tearful.*)

I don't know what I can say to you. . . . Stupid maid. . . . It's been a terrible day!

(*Motions Minick back to his seat; goes to chair, assumes again the rôle of chairman.*

Miss Stack takes a few folded sheets of

paper from her bag and fans herself, looking about to see if a door or window can't be opened.)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

'Tis close, isn't it?

NETTIE

Come to order, ladies! We were—uh—we were just taking up——

MISS STACK

(*Rises suddenly; at same instant Miss Crackenwald does likewise; they speak simultaneously.*)

Madam Chairman!

MISS CRACKENWALD

Madam Chairman!

NETTIE

Miss—uh——

MINICK

(*Points to Miss Stack*)

She was up first. The little one!

NETTIE

Father! . . . Miss Stack?

MISS STACK

I rise to a point of personal privilege. I move——

(*The doorbell rings.*)

MARGE

(*Off*)
May I come in!

NETTIE

Oh, it's Mrs. Diamond now!

MARGE

(*Enters*)
Hello, everybody! Not late, am I?
(*She was never anything else in her life, of course.*)

NETTIE

Only an hour.

LIL

Hello, Marge!

MARGE

Hello, Lil!

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

Please! I have a most important engagement at five.

NETTIE

Marge, you knew we were meeting at three. Being secretary, it seems to me you might at least——

MARGE

I'm sorry—I was held up. And I can't stay.

I promised Natalie Gaige I'd look in at the Blake reception.

NETTIE

You've got to stay.

MISS STACK

We haven't a quorum without you.

MARGE

But Irma's waiting downstairs in the electric.

(*Minick goes up to the window.*)

MISS CRACKENWALD

Well, really!

LIL

Now, Marge Diamond, listen to me! If the rest of us are willing to give our time surely you ought to have some sense of responsibility.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

I have two utter strangers coming to dinner—business friends of Mr. Smallridge—and a maid that doesn't know her head from a hole in the ground, yet here *I* am!

LIL

You sit right down in that chair, Marge Diamond.

MARGE

(*Trapped, but still fighting. Turns back her glove cuff to consult wrist watch.*)

I can stay just—five minutes and not a second——

MINICK

(*Pointing out of the window*)

There's your friend! You can see her right from here.

MARGE

Oh!

(*Before they can stop her she is off to the window, has thrown it open, the wind swoops through the room, scattering papers. Calls, leaning out:*)

Yoo hoo! Irma! Yoo hoo! Listen!

(*Laboured.*)

I've got to stay five minutes.

(*More laboured, and with longer intervals between the words.*)

I've—got—to—stay—five—MINUTES! Will you wait for me! Wait for me!

(*Slams down the window.*)

NETTIE

(*As the window is opened clutches the flying papers again.*)

Oh, my goodness! Marge! Marge, put down that window!

(*During the remainder of Marge's lines,*

Nettie is standing holding down the papers on her desk. Having finished, Marge slams down the window, turns back to Nettie.)

MARGE

What? What did you say?

NETTIE

Oh, nothing, Marge! Won't you please sit down now?

MARGE

(*Outraged dignity*)
I am! I——
(*Seats herself. Looks about with an injured air.*)
Well—why don't you go ahead!
(*Miss Crackenwald clears her throat.*)

NETTIE

With Mrs. Diamond here now——

MINICK

Say! There was a party called you up on the telephone.

NETTIE

Father!

MINICK

(*To Nettie*)
You forgot.

NETTIE

Father! It wasn't important, Marge. Now——

MARGE

(*Rises*)
Who was it?

NETTIE

It wasn't anything.

MINICK

I remember. It was her house.
(*Marge goes to 'phone.*)
Your house called you up. Wants you to call them.

MARGE

Why didn't you——
(*Into 'phone.*)
Dorchester 1653.
(*To the others.*)
Mama's taking care of Melville. It's Miss Eaton's day out. I hope——

NETTIE

Oh, dear! Well, the question is, shall we go back and have the minutes read now that Mrs. Diamond has come?

SIMULTANEOUSLY

MRS. STACK

(*Jumping up*)

I move that the minutes be read.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

I second the motion.

NETTIE

It's been moved and seconded that we go back and have the Recording Secretary read the minutes. Are there any remarks?

MISS CRACKENWALD

Well, it does seem to me——

NETTIE

Miss Crackenwald?

(*With a gesture of futility Miss Crackenwald sits.*)

All those in favour say Aye.

(*Mesdames Lippincott,*

MARGE

Yes, that's right. . . . Hulda, this is Mrs. Diamond. . . . Listen, did Mother call me? . . . This is Mrs. Diamond! Did *Mother* call me? . . . Mother, what do you . . . What's the matter with him? . . . Well, what? . . . Not the big one in the hall! Oh! Well, where were you. . . . You brought up children of your own! . . . I don't see why . . . with what? . . . Every time you stay with him . . . let me talk to him . . . Oh! . . .

Stack and Smallridge, and Lil: "Aye." A gusty breath of remonstrance from Miss Crackenwald.)

Opposed?

MISS CRACKENWALD

No.

NETTIE

The motion is carried. . . . Marge! Marge! . . . Oh! . . .

MARGE

Just a minute, Nettie. . . . Melville . . . Meville, this is Mama. What were you doing in the hall in the first place? . . . But you're not allowed to ride your velocipede out there. . . . That was one of Mama's nicest lamps. . . . Now don't cry! Stop that crying, Melville, and tell me. . . . Talk plainly. Take your fingers out of your mouth. . . . Well, what have you got in your mouth? . . . Good heavens! . . . Take it out! Take it out this minute, Mother says. And listen to me. You can't have your velocipede again for a long, long time. And what's more I'm going to tell Father when he comes home. You're a naughty, naughty boy!

(*Hangs up the receiver. Turns to the others.*)

My Chinese lamp that Al gave me for my anniversary.

NETTIE

That's too bad. But really we've got to get on. We've just voted to go back and have you read the minutes.

MARGE

What minutes?

NETTIE

Marge! *Your* minutes. The minutes of the last meeting.

MARGE

Why, I didn't think this was a regular meeting, Nettie. When Hulda gave me your message——

NETTIE

Do you mean to say you didn't bring them?

MARGE

I had no idea you'd want them to-day. I thought it was sort of a special meeting.

MINICK

Didn't she bring it?

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

Can't we get on, then? . . . Miss Crackenwald!

(*Miss Crackenwald rises.*)

NETTIE

Yes, please.

MISS CRACKENWALD

Well, if I may be assured of a few uninterrupted moments.

(*Looks at Marge; Marge sits in desk chair.*)

(*Reads.*)

Following the collapse of the plan to bring parents and children together in closer accord through the medium of the school house—I was asked, on August tenth of the current year—

(*Here Marge rises, goes to 'phone stool, Nettie motions her to sit. Miss Crackenwald sees her and repeats:*)

—of the current year—

(*Marge sits on the 'phone stool and smiles at Miss Crackenwala, apparently all attention now.*)

—to undertake a survey of some of the homes in the districts where conditions demand special attention, with a view to evolving a new plan for establishing between parents and children that bond which is so necessary. This is indeed a most vital work. As our Federation president, Louisa Stout Breckenridge, said so concisely—

(*Punctuates the word with a gesture.*)

in her keynote speech at the convention in Springfield, "The youth of to-day is the citizen of to-morrow."

(*Marge has been edging toward door and now quietly tiptoes into hallway.*)

It is with the training of that youth that we concern ourselves here to-day.

(*Marge slams outer door.*)

And how can we better bring that about than by encouraging that youth to emulate the admirable qualities of that sturdy stock from which has—uh—sprung—the people who make up our population to-day—who make up our population to-day.

(*Shuffles three or four sheets of her paper but resumes reading from the top sheet again.*

Lula enters from the dining room carrying a silver platter of fancy sandwiches and pitcher of orange juice with glasses. These she places on table. It is a quiet entrance, but the plates as they are set down clatter a little.)

Now—uh—

(*Her platform voice and manner return.*) our problem, then, specifically, is to inculcate in the new generation a greater love and affection for the traditions of the old. As the logical medium for the furtherance of this ideal condition we have hit upon the Home. Bring Parent and Child together in the Home. Keep the child in the home by making that home more attractive than the streets—more entertaining than the motion picture palace—more alluring than the dance hall. To this end let us adopt

as our slogan, "Every Home a Club." Let us launch the Every Home a Club Movement. The boy and girl will not wander from the fireside if it holds for him the same games and pastimes that he is offered in the billiard parlours and pool rooms, in the corner drug or cigar stores——

MINICK

(*Has been growing more and more interested and restless during this speech; now reaches the point where he can no longer contain himself.*)

Now right there is where you're all wrong!

NETTIE

Father! You must not interrupt. You must not——

MINICK

Now, now! You're on the wrong track and I can prove it to you!

NETTIE

Father, not now! You can't!

SIMULTANEOUSLY

MINICK	
I can so! Yessir! Because now you're talking about something I've seen with my own	(*All the women rise in indignation. Nettie gives up the fight.*)

eyes! And this was it! There were six Hassauer boys that lived right across the street from us in Bloomington—Nettie, you've heard Fred talk of 'em—as fine boys as ever you'd want to see—but run, run, run every night. Eat their supper and out. Got so their pa and ma practically never saw 'em. So they got the idea of buying a billiard table to keep 'em in—had one sent down from Chicago——

(turns and finds he has suddenly lost his audience.)

What you doing? Busting up? I hope I ain't discouraged you. Plenty other good work you girls can do.

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

This is really——

MISS STACK

Yes, indeed!

MISS CRACKENWALD

Mrs. Minick, I'm afraid I shall have to go.

(Exits to Nettie's room for her hat.)

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

(Turning to Net and Lil:)

I move that we adjourn until the twenty-second and meet at my house.

LIL

I don't think that's in order, Mrs. Lippincott.

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

A motion to adjourn is always in order, Mrs. Corey.

MINICK

(*Mrs. Lippincott indignantly sweeps toward door right and exits.*)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

(*As she crosses.*)

Are we going?

(*Follows the others out.*)

(*Miss Crackenwald re-enters and crosses.*)

MINICK

(*Turns and sees Miss Crackenwald.*)

You've got a good head on you!

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

(*Re-enters, her coat half on.*)

Good-day, Mrs. Minick.

MISS STACK

(*Following her leader as always.*)

Good-day, Mrs. Minick.

MISS CRACKENWALD

Good afternoon.

(*Fred enters from the hall. He is home from the office, the evening paper in his hand. He is wearing a light-coloured overcoat and soft grey hat. He takes off the latter as he enters.*)

FRED

Well, well! I didn't know this was going on. Hello there, ladies!

(*To Miss Crackenwald, who stands in the doorway as he enters.*)

Howdy-do, Miss Crackenwald!

(*Extends his hand, which she takes frigidly.*)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Good evening, Mr. Minick. My, it must be late!

(*Miss Lippincott and Miss Stack start for right, followed more slowly by Mrs. Smallridge, whose coat is still in the hall.*)

FRED

Oh, not going, are you!

MRS. LIPPINCOTT

I'm afraid we must.

(*As she passes him.*)

FRED

Well, I'm sorry! I'd ask you all to stay to dinner, only I've been married long enough to know better.

(*To Nettie.*)

Haven't I, old lady!

(*Pats her shoulder, gives it a little squeeze. Looks at her. In undertone:*)

What's the matter?

NETTIE

(*Pushes him away.*)
Please!

MISS CRACKENWALD

Good-day!

(*Miss Crackenwald, Mrs. Lippincott, and Miss Stack go off. Fred senses something strained in the atmosphere. As the door slams he looks at Nettie inquiringly, and at Lil.*)

MINICK

Say! Here's the sandwiches. The ladies forgot to eat the sandwiches.

(*Is standing over them, investigating their contents. Now takes one, begins to eat.*)

FRED

Anything wrong?

LIL

Net'll tell you all about it.

(*Goes to hall for coat.*)

(*Mrs. Smallridge re-enters, buttoning coat.*)

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Well, good-bye, Nettie.

(*Her nervous laugh.*)

NETTIE

Good-bye.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

(*To Minick*)

Good-bye, Mr. Minick. That's right. Feed a cold and starve a fever.

MINICK

(*Rather incoherent, his mouth full of sandwiches. Nods and swallows rapidly.*)

You want to try one of these. Pretty good.

MRS. SMALLRIDGE

Well, I don't want to spoil my dinner. I have some friends of Mr. Smallridge's coming and—Well, good-bye. Good-bye, Fred. Good-bye, Nettie.

(*Lil has re-entered, is putting on her coat.*)

Such a nice meeting.

(*Goes.*)

MINICK

(*Discovers a new variety of sandwich.*)

H'm! Tomato!

FRED

What's eating you girls, anyhow?

LIL

Can I do anything for you, Net?

NETTIE

No, thanks.

LIL

I'll 'phone you right after dinner, and I'll probably bring Jim over. Good-bye. Good-bye, Fred.

(*Exits.*)

FRED

For heaven's sakes, Net, why the martyr stuff? What's the matter?

NETTIE

Don't speak to me!

FRED

Don't be so tragic. What's happened?

MINICK

Fred, Nettie and I want to talk to you.

FRED

Huh?

(*Still bewildered.*)

NETTIE

(*In desperation*)

Father Minick, won't you please leave Fred and me alone, now!

FRED

(*A look at Nettie.*)

Perhaps you'd better, Dad.

MINICK

(*Starts toward passage.*)
Well, all right. But I want to talk to you. Yessir!

(*He goes to his room.*)

NETTIE

Oh!

FRED

For God's sake, Nettie, what is this all about!

NETTIE

(*Regards him rather wildly a moment.*)
About!

(*Her voice breaking:*)
I'll tell you what it's about! It's about you and him and me and everything else! That's what it's about!

(*Is half crying.*)

FRED

Well, what have I—has Father done something? What is it?

NETTIE

(*Now deadly calm*)
It's just this, Fred Minick. I was good enough for you to bring your father into this house and saddle him on me all day long, every day—good enough to have him humiliate me before all these women and probably lose me my

chairmanship that it's taken me months—and that Mrs. Lippincott—the audacity——

FRED

(*Crosses to her and puts his arm around her to comfort her.*)

Oh, Nettie—I'm terribly sorry. Now, you're just tired.

NETTIE

(*Pushes him away.*)

Oh, yes! I was good enough for that! But when it came to confiding in your wife that you were risking God knows how much money in a business that you don't know any more about than a child—that's different, I suppose!

FRED

(*A sigh. He knows the storm is upon him.*)

Oh, God!

NETTIE

And I suppose everybody in town would have known it before me if your father hadn't just stumbled on it——

FRED

Father! What does he know? He doesn't——

NETTIE

And this afternoon! Not only does that

lovely news about you and Jim come just as I'm expecting them for a most important meeting because that Clara Whitney——Sick! is she!

(*Throws a chair to one side and flings herself upon sofa.*)

—Well, look at me! I'm sick—sick and tired of being the one to sacrifice, and suffer, and then not even be told what my own husband is doing!

FRED

Now, Nettie, this thing is as safe as a bank! What's the use of getting all worked up about nothing?

NETTIE

Nothing! Oh, it's nothing, is it? Nothing for me to have been humiliated this afternoon as no woman was ever humiliated before in the world! I'll never be able to face any of those women again! Do you suppose they'll let me go to the convention at Springfield after what happened in this house this afternoon?

FRED

For God's sake, what did happen?

NETTIE

What happened? I'll tell you what happened! Your father disgraced me in front of all those women; he offended one of the biggest women in club work to-day! Well, I've stood a good deal

in the six months he's been here—yes, and from you too—but I've reached the end—

(*Rises.*)

—do you understand me? I've reached the end!

FRED

(*Crosses to her.*)

Nettie, you're making an awful fuss about nothing! You're——

NETTIE

(*Turning on him*)

Nothing? Oh, I suppose everything is nothing to you! It was nothing when I had to sit on that hotel porch with him and those terrible old women for weeks last summer, while you went off on your fishing trips! And it was nothing that I had to entertain that miserable Phil What's-his-name in this house till I thought I'd go crazy——

FRED

Now let me tell you something! Phil Lemming is one of the whitest men in Chicago, and he's gone through for me a dozen times!

NETTIE

He's a good-for-nothing drunken loafer, that's what he is, and so's his wife!

FRED

Oh! And how about your friend Bessie

Cowan, or whatever her name was, that was running in here all summer? I suppose she was a sweet young thing, wasn't she?

NETTIE

She didn't do anything to you! If I'd ever made you put up with one-tenth of the things that you've made me endure, I tell you I'd have heard about it long ago!

FRED

Oh, I hear about it!

NETTIE

Well, all I can say is that your father and the way he's behaved here this afternoon is the last straw! And I want to know what you're going to do about it!

FRED

Oh, Nettie, don't talk silly! Just because——

NETTIE

I mean it! What is there in it for me, anyhow? I was doing very well before I ever married you! I was earning my own good living, and I can do it again! Where am I now! There isn't a girl in the crowd but what has twice as many clothes as I have! I've gone out in that green chiffon until I'd think even you'd feel ashamed! And now what thanks do I get? You take every cent we've got and throw it away——

FRED

I haven't thrown it away! You're going to——

NETTIE

And now, on top of it all, I have to put up with this!

(*Waves a hand that is meant to indicate Minick, goes down and starts returning articles from bookcase to smoking table.*)

I can't even have my own home to myself any more! You know what pride I took in fixing it up—nobody enjoyed having friends in more than I did! And I was the one that made them want to come—you never made any effort! But they've been coming less and less, haven't they? Even you must have noticed that. And pretty soon they won't be coming at all.

(*Has taken gavel from smoking table and is putting it on bookcase, when the full import of her last words sinks in. She turns and goes to him and speaks very deliberately.*)

Well, before that happens I want to tell you something. I'm through! Either he goes out of this house or I do, and you can take your choice.

(*Starts to cross.*)

FRED

(*Stopping her*)

Oh, now, you know you don't mean that! You've got yourself all worked up!

NETTIE

Oh, don't I, though? Well, this is all I've got to say, and I mean every word of it! Either your father goes out of this house or I do, Fred Minick—

(*An emphatic pause.*)

—and I don't care which it is!

(*Exits into passage, going to her room and slamming the door shut. Fred walks up toward the window in desperation. Minick enters from the passage. His entrance is a pretty portentous one. That of the father who is going to remonstrate with his little boy.*)

MINICK

Now, Fred! I want you to listen to me.

FRED

(*A gesture of a man who has all he can stand and will hear no more.*)

Father!

MINICK

I don't know what Nettie's had to say to you, but I want you to tell me all about this nonsense of yours!

FRED

Father, for God's sake! Will you——

MINICK

All right! But I'm going to take hold of things just the same! I remember when you were nine years old——

FRED

But I'm not nine years old any longer. You don't seem to realise that!

MINICK

I realise you got no right to jump into a thing like this without coming to me about it——

FRED

Father, for God's sake! You're an old man! What do you know about modern business?

(*Crosses, taking his hat from desk as he goes.*)

If you'd only stay out of my affairs——

(*Exits and slams the outer door.*)

MINICK

(*Stands for a moment, dazed. He crumples visibly.*)

An old man—that's what he said—an old man.

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE

The scene is the same.

TIME

Eight o'clock the following morning.

The room faces East. The bright morning sun is streaming in.

Fred enters from the passage. He is in his bathrobe; his hair is tousled. He glances about as though searching for something. Not finding it in the living room he goes out into the hall. The outside door is heard to open and close. He returns, plainly annoyed now. Calls.

FRED

Lula! Lula!

(*Gives a look into the dining room. Calls a third time.*)

Lula!

(*Lula enters in early morning working clothes and kitchen apron. She is in the process of preparing breakfast. Fred starts to speak just a second before Lula is seen by the audience.*)

Lula, where's the morning paper? Did you bring it in?

LULA

What?

FRED

Did you bring in the morning paper?

LULA

Yes, sir. I brought it in when I came. I put it right on your chair like always.

FRED

Well then, I suppose——

(Nettie enters from the passage. She is wearing a plain dark cloth dress.)

NETTIE

(Wearily)

Good morning, Lula.

LULA

'Morning. Guess it's in Mr. Minick's room again. I'll go see. . . . You folks pret' near ready for breakfast?

NETTIE

What's in Mr. Minick's room?

FRED

The morning paper.

LULA

You folks pret' near ready for breakfast? How you want your eggs?

NETTIE

Nothing for me but a cup of black coffee.

LULA

(*Has turned to go. Over her shoulder:*)
No toast?

NETTIE

I don't want anything but a cup of black coffee. I didn't close an eye all night.

FRED

(*Annoyed*)

Lula, will you get me that newspaper?

LULA

Yes, sir.

(*Goes. Nettie marches past Fred with a good deal of breeze, goes to her desk, arranges papers, opens and shuts drawers. Fred eyes her briefly and rather furtively over his shoulder.*)

FRED

I thought you slept pretty well. Asleep every time I looked at you.

NETTIE

I heard the clock strike one—I heard it strike two—three—four—five. I dropped off for a minute around six, and then I heard Lula come in.

(By the way her hand goes to her head we are led to suspect she has a headache. Lula enters with the newspaper, which is very much rumpled and awry. As she enters Fred takes a step towards her to receive paper. His eye alights on it. He gives an exclamation of vexation at its disarray. Nettie, seeing this, gives a glance of mild triumph that says, "Well, it's your father!" Lula goes off. Fred starts to straighten the paper. Nettie sighs gustily.)

He's holding us all up; Lula's waiting breakfast; you're not even dressed.

FRED

Oh, well—all right.

NETTIE

He's been in that bathroom exactly twenty minutes by the clock. I'm going to call him.

(Nettie goes into the passage.)

FRED

(Just a gesture intended to restrain her.)

Now!——

(Stands listening a bit apprehensively, paper in hand.)

Photo by White Studio

FRED: "Oh! For——"

NETTIE

(*Knocking at bathroom door off. Calls:*)
Father!

(*A muffled response from Minick.*)
Are you all right?

(*Another muffled response that is vaguely, "Sure, I'm all right."*)
Well—we were just wondering. You've been in there so long.

(*Another mumble from Minick.*)
Well, all right. But Fred is waiting. . . . All right.

(*Fred turns his attention to the newspaper. It is, in its present state, more than he can handle. He looks for a place on which to spread it, lays it on the big table, straightens it. One or two sections are upside down. The paper adjusted, he starts to read it.*

Minick, scrubbed and shirtless, appears in the passage. His outer shirt in hand, in his haste. His feet in the hall, his upper body projecting far out in the living room as he grasps the door-jamb.)

MINICK

I'm out!

(*He looks like a rosy old cherub. Pops back at once to his own bedroom.*)

FRED

Oh, all right.

(Goes right on reading his newspaper, but edging away from it, the tail of his eye on the end of the column of the story in which he was interested.

Nettie returns. In the dining room Lula can be heard placing plates and breakfast dishes. You even catch a glimpse of her moving about the table.)

NETTIE

Fred, will you go in and finish dressing!

(Goes up to her desk.)

I can't have Lula getting three breakfasts every morning.

FRED

(A last look at the paper. Perhaps takes a step back for another glance.)

Yeh.

(An inarticulate assent. Goes off.)

NETTIE

(Taking paper and pencil from desk. Notices Lula in dining room.)

Oh—Lula. Come here, will you?

LULA

Yeh.

(Comes to dining-room doorway, three forks in her hand.)

NETTIE

(*Turns toward Lula, pencil in hand, paper ready on desk.*)

Now—what do we need? There's enough lamb left for stew, isn't there?

LULA

Don't hardly think so.

NETTIE

There ought to be. I didn't eat a mouthful last night; and Mr. Min——we'll make it do. . . . Any carrots in the house?

LULA

No, ma'am.

NETTIE

No c——I'll get a small bunch.

(*Writes carrots.*)

Open a can of peas.

(*Makes a circular gesture that wreathes the stew in carrots and peas.*)

You can bake a lemon pie. We ought to have a nice dessert with——

LULA

Lemon pie, when I got all that cleaning?

NETTIE

All right. We'll just cut up some fruit . . .

(*Half to herself.*)

Now what else do we need? . . . Potatoes . . . Onions . . . see Holzman . . . electric light globes . . .

(*Looks up perfunctorily.*)

We've got plenty of coffee.

LULA

No'm. Used up the last of it for breakfast.

NETTIE

Why, Lula, you couldn't! I just got a pound Saturday.

LULA

Ain't none there.

NETTIE

You're drinking too much coffee, Lula. Very bad for you. Make you nervous.

LULA

(*Laughs*)

I ain't nervous.

NETTIE

Well——

(*A little sound of disapproval.*)

We've got sugar.

LULA

No, ma'am.

NETTIE

(*A look at Lula. Writes sugar.*)
Bread . . . Butter? . . . No, we don't need butter . . .

LULA

Yeh, we need butter.

NETTIE

(*Outraged*)
But, Lula!
(*Turns back to list, defeated. Writes.*)
Butter . . . rice . . . lentils . . . Now, is there anything else we need?
(*Lula now goes off into a trance of deep thought. As she thinks she absent-mindedly brings the forks up to her mouth and taps her lips with them, lost in concentration.*)

LULA

Now—let me see. No, ma'am. We don't need anything.

NETTIE

You're sure, Lula? Think hard. I don't want you to——

LULA

(*Putting hand to face in attitude of deep thought.*)

No'm. Can't think of anything.

(*Goes into dining room. Minick enters, fully dressed.*)

MINICK

Breakfast ready?

NETTIE

Good morning, Father.

(*Putting her list away.*)

MINICK

(*A bit of strain in his manner.*)

Morning. Where's Fred? Getting dressed?

NETTIE

He'll be right out.

MINICK

I want to talk to Fred.

NETTIE

He'll be here in a minute. Did you sleep well?

MINICK

Fair, fair!

NETTIE

I looked in before we went to bed, but you were sound asleep.

MINICK

I heard you. And I heard the four of you going on out here until must have been midnight—you and the Coreys.

NETTIE

Oh—we were just talking.

MINICK

I know—I know.

(*To Lula, in the dining room:*)

Look here, m'girl! I ain't been getting my other pillow lately. What you been doing with it?

NETTIE

Father, please! If there's anything you want tell *me* and not Lula.

MINICK

Two nights now she ain't been giving me my other pillow.

NETTIE

Father, you know you only use one pillow. I told Lula to take the other one away.

MINICK

(*Firm about it*)

I sleep on two pillows.

NETTIE

But you don't. Morning after morning, when

we make up the bed, we find one on the floor. You sleep on one pillow.

MINICK

(*Not yielding an inch*)

I sleep on two pillows. Ma always gave me two.

NETTIE

(*With a sigh*)

All right, Father. You'll have two to-night.

(*Lula appears in dining room doorway, waving a percolator.*)

LULA

Everybody ready?

(*It is an announcement rather than a query; she disappears immediately.*)

NETTIE

(*Calling*)

Fred! Are you ready?

FRED

All right! In a minute!

(*His voice comes from far off.*)

NETTIE

Well, hurry up!

FRED

(*Still far off*)

Go ahead—I'll be right in!

NETTIE

Come, Father.

MINICK

(*Still on his pillows*)
Always *have* used two pillows.
(*Nettie and Minick go into the dining room. You still hear them, however, in the minutiæ of getting settled and eating.*)
What you got for breakfast? Something good?

NETTIE

About the same as usual, Father. Thanks, Lula.

MINICK

Orange juice, eh? Left over from the party, huh?
(*The noise of silverware.*)
Where's Fred—coming?

NETTIE

He'll be here in a minute, Father.

MINICK

Don't know where that snow is they were predicting. Don't look much like snow to me today. Just guess at it, that's all they do. Guess at it. Hello, Fred.

FRED

Good morning, Father.

NETTIE

Drink your orange juice, Fred—we're waiting for you.

FRED

I don't want any.

MINICK

Don't want any orange juice? Whole pitcher of it in the kitchen.

NETTIE

You can take Mr. Minick's glass, Lula. He doesn't want any.

(*Fred enters from the dining room, gathers up the newspaper from the table; goes back into dining room.*)

MINICK

Not much news in the paper . . .

(*A pause.*)

Well, looks as if my cold just about left overnight. Yes, sir. Did me good, going out yesterday. Feel like having a pipe after breakfast—that's a good sign. First time in four days. Pipe certainly don't taste like anything when you got a cold.

FRED

Can't you think of anything but eggs for breakfast?

NETTIE

We're lucky to have those.

MINICK

Understand over in England the English people eat a good deal of fish for breakfast. Got one fish they call a bloater, and another one they call the kipper or something. Somebody was telling me about it. Forget who it was. Fellow over at the Home, I guess. Ya, that's who it was. Fellow name of McIntyre. Scotty, they call him.

(*The door bell rings.*)

Who's that, I wonder? Somebody coming?

FRED

It's probably just mail, Father.

(*Lula crosses.*)

MINICK

Nope. Wasn't his ring. Always rings twice.

NETTIE

It may be Lil. She's going downtown early.

(*Minick appears in the dining room doorway—a half-eaten piece of toast in his hand and a napkin tucked in his collar. On the napkin is an egg spot, large enough to be in evidence. He is present purely out of curiosity, and continues to munch in a speculative way as he watches to see*

who is at the door. You hear the door opened off.)

DIETENHOFER (*off*)

Old gentleman in?

LULA

(*In a tired voice*)

Yessir—he's in.

(*When he hears Dietenhofer's voice Minick evinces immediate interest.*)

MINICK

(*Half to himself and half to Fred and Nettie*)

Gosh, it's Dietenhofer.

(*Dietenhofer and Price enter, followed by Lula.*)

And Price too. Hel-lo there!

(*Pops the last of the toast into his mouth.*)

You must have got up in the middle of the night!

(*Lula crosses, exits again.*)

DIETENHOFER

Good morning!

PRICE

Morning!

(*Nettie enters from the dining room.*)

MINICK

Well! Just in time for a bite of breakfast.

DIETENHOFER

No—we come to tell you something.

NETTIE

(*Rather stiffly*)
Good morning.

DIETENHOFER

'Morning, ma'am. We don't aim to intrude. We just dropped in for a minute to see—(*hesitates*)—Minick about something.

NETTIE

(*A bit coldly*)
That's all right. Won't you take off your things? . . . Father?
(*Indicating that he might assist them.*)

MINICK

Yeh!

DIETENHOFER

No, thank you, ma'am.

PRICE

(*Ever the tardy explainer.*)
We just dropped in.

NETTIE

Well, I'm sure you'll—just

(*Starts for the back of the house.*)
make yourself——Excuse me.

(*Exits.*)

MINICK

Sit down! Sit down!

(*Calls into dining room.*)
Fred!

FRED

What?

MINICK

I want you to meet couple of friends of mine. . . . Gentlemen, you've never met my son.

DIETENHOFER

No! No! But we want to talk to *you.* It's important!

(*Dietenhofer and Price are noticeably uneasy and restless.*)

MINICK

Here he is!

(*Fred enters.*)
Fred, I want to make you acquainted with Mr. Dietenhofer and Mr. Price. My son Fred.

(*A hand proudly on his shoulder.*)

FRED

How are you, gentlemen?

DIETENHOFER

Howdy-do?

(*Shakes hands with Fred.*)

PRICE

How are you!

(*While the handshaking is in progress Minick has remembered the napkin tucked in his collar, wipes his mouth with it, jerks it off, tosses it on a nearby chair.*)

FRED

Sit down, gentlemen! My father's often spoken of you. Sit down.

DIETENHOFER

(*Hesitates*)

Well—

(*Sits.*)

(*Price does likewise. Both eye Fred narrowly. A look is exchanged between the two visitors.*)

FRED

Well! You're a couple of early birds, aren't you?

DIETENHOFER

Why, we just dropped in to talk over a little matter——

PRICE

With Minick.

FRED

(*A little laugh*)

Well, I guess I'm not qualified to sit in on your debates. I understand you boys have some pretty lively sessions over in the park. I'd certainly like to join you, though, if I can get a day off from the office.

DIETENHOFER

Sure! Sure!

FRED

Yes, indeed!

DIETENHOFER

I understand you've just gone into a *new* business, Mr. Minick.

FRED

(*His smile vanishing*)

What's that?

DIETENHOFER

Minick here was telling us you've gone into the mail-order business.

FRED

(*None too pleased*)

Oh, was he!

MINICK

(*Taking an embarrassed turn up to the window.*)

Well—we were just talking—and I happened to bring up the——

PRICE

(*Judicial*)

How's it look?

FRED

(*Somewhat stiffly*)

All right, thank you.

DIETENHOFER

Minick here seemed pretty worried about it yesterday——

(*Minick is shifting, a little guiltily.*)

FRED

Indeed!

DIETENHOFER

He was asking us what we thought about it. Of course Price and me—we didn't know much about it, but—we got taking it up with a few of the boys over at the Home last night—just a little crowd—ten, twelve—and they seemed to think you picked a pretty shaky time for it.

FRED

Oh—really?

PRICE

Tell him what Davison said.

FRED

(*Rises*)
Thank you. Some other time.
(*Moves toward the passage.*)
I have to go now.
(*A quick glance at Minick.*)
God!
(*Exits.*)

DIETENHOFER

He went off pretty sudden.
(*Rises with Price.*)
But I'm glad he went. Ain't we, Price?
(*In a confidential tone:*)
We come to tell you something you'll be mighty interested to learn.

MINICK

What's that?

DIETENHOFER

Remember what I told you yesterday about Patterson? Los Angeles? Well, he's going.

PRICE

Los Angeles.

MINICK

Well?

DIETENHOFER

Got a despatch this morning and going right out this afternoon. There's your chance. Can't tell how long it'll be vacant. They grab 'em up mighty quick. You could get in if you went after it. Trimble likes you first rate, and so does she.

PRICE

We come right over.

DIETENHOFER

Course I know you said yesterday you wouldn't ever. But Price and me, we noticed your son's wife was pretty hitey-titey with you. We was sort of remarking about it on the way home.

MINICK

(*Slowly, thoughtfully*)

Oh, Nettie, she don't mean any harm. Kind of flares up now and then——

DIETENHOFER

Well, harm or no harm, the minute I heard Patterson—

(*Fred comes down the passage.*)

—was actually going I says to Price, I says—

(*Turns to Price and then back to Minick.*)

Price, here's the chance for Minick to come into the Home, where he can pay his three hundred a year and free as a bird.

(*Sees Fred and takes a step back.*)

PRICE

That's what you——

(*Stops short on seeing Fred.*)

FRED

(*Enters.*)

What's that?

(*Takes a step in, his eyes on the old men, a dazed look on his face as though he has heard something his ears could not credit. He is carrying his overcoat, limply, so that it drags slightly on the floor. He is unaware that he has it in his hand. As he speaks he lets the coat slide onto a chair without knowing it is gone. Bewilderment, unbelief, pain are in his voice.*)

Do you mean to tell me that you're trying to persuade my father to go into the—

(*A vague gesture toward it.*)

—that Home?

MINICK

No harm meant. They just thought that if I *was* thinking of going over there, why——

(*Price and Dietenhofer, thoroughly frightened, back up toward the door.*)

FRED

But you're not, Dad. Tell them you're not!

MINICK

Mm—I wasn't exactly thinking of it——

FRED

I should hope not! Why, I never heard of such a thing. Home!

MINICK

Well, a body might do worse, at that.

FRED

Dad, you don't mean to tell me you actually—*are* thinking about it!

(*A moment's heavy pause; Lula enters from the dining room and snatches Minick's napkin from the chair.*)

DIETENHOFER

Guess we'll be getting on our way.

(*He escapes with Price.*)

FRED

(*His eyes searching the old man's face*)

Father!

(*The outer door slams. Actual terror in his voice.*)

Nettie!

MINICK

(*Raises a pacifying hand, though his tone is not completely reassuring.*)

MINICK

Now—now! Don't you get *her* all excited!
(*Nettie re-enters from the passage.*)

FRED

Nettie! Did you ever suspect that Dad was thinking of leaving here!

NETTIE

Leaving!

FRED

That he was thinking of going to a Home?

NETTIE

Why—no!

FRED

Well—he is!

MINICK

Now, I don't want you to get stirred up about this—you and Nettie. I thought it all out last night, and I've got it straight in my mind.

NETTIE

Why, Father, what is it?

MINICK

(*To Fred*)
Well, you see, when you flared up at me yesterday——

FRED

Now, Dad, I didn't mean——

MINICK

That's all right. I was kind of taken aback at first. Didn't know just what to make of it, and then—I got to thinking. And I remembered how Nettie's club ladies—they busted up the minute I started to talk to them.

NETTIE

That's over now. Let's not talk about it.

MINICK

And then, putting two and two together—all of a sudden, it come to me. I says to myself—Fred and Nettie—they're right. They don't want to be told things by an old fellow like me.

FRED

Why, Dad, you're not old!

MINICK

I'm turned seventy-two. Yessir! I'm a pretty old codger. It's funny how you don't realize that till somebody tells you right out.

FRED

Oh!

MINICK

You fool yourself. Everybody else gets old,

but not you. You see, I belong to one—time, and you belong to another. You go to work and try to mix up the two and you run right smack into trouble. Look at yesterday. I was telling that girl—you know—one that made the speech —that what she was saying wouldn't work.

NETTIE

But, Father, Miss Crackenwald is an authority on——

MINICK

Say, you can put nineteen billiard tables in your house, and your youngsters will run around the corner to play billiards just the same.

FRED

That's all right, Dad. She didn't——

MINICK

Of course not. And that ain't what I'm aiming at. I mean the whole thing. Not just you and me and Nettie. But you see, young people don't think old people have got any sense; and old people don't think young folks know anything. You take out in the park all summer, there wasn't a better informed man among 'em than I was. Problems of the day. You take whether Germany can meet her payments——

FRED

We know, Dad. But you and I understand each other.

MINICK

Why, mornings they used to wait till I got there before they'd start in. "Here he comes now, they'd say." Yessir, we'd have it hot and heavy, and it'd take a pretty good man to down me. And that's why—with winter coming and—no park—you see, a fellow has got to have people around that understands him.

NETTIE

But you can have your friends in here. It just happened that yesterday I had that meeting.

FRED

Yes!

MINICK

Over there, they've all got about the same way of doing things. That's why I want to go. Get up early in the morning, you don't have to worry for fear you're going to wake somebody else up. If you want company, all you have to do is open your door. If you don't want company, shut it. You see, when a fellow gets my age he's kind of set in his ways. I guess maybe Ma used to spoil me.

FRED

We're going to take care of you now.

MINICK

Sit and listen to me by the hour. "That's so,

Ben." "You're right, Ben." Used to make me think I was smarter than all get-out. I guess maybe *she* was the smart one.

FRED

But, Dad—you are smart.

NETTIE

I should say so.

FRED

Why, for your age——

MINICK

(*Raises an accusing finger.*)
You see!

FRED

Dad, you make me feel just terrible. Do you think we'd let you go away from here? Never!

NETTIE

It'll work out. You'll see.

FRED

Now come, Dad.

MINICK

(*Still with his own thoughts:*)
But here's the funny part of it. Once, after she took sick, she said, "Ben, Fred and Nettie are going to want you to come with them. Don't

you do it." You see, Ma didn't ever know how bad things got to be with the money. But she knew a lot of things I'm just finding out. She was pretty smart.

FRED

But Dad, you're all wrong. Now we're going to keep you right here and look after you.

NETTIE

It's going to be your home as much as ours, and you can do just whatever you like.

MINICK

No, I don't want you to change for me. It ain't natural. No call for you children to live an old man's life, but you see with me——

FRED

But, Dad, we'll do anything to make you happy.

NETTIE

Of course.

MINICK

H'm, well—I know. But I don't want to feel that anybody's waiting around for me—you see, us Minicks, we're long livers. I'm good for another ten, fifteen years.

FRED

Of course you are, Dad, and you're going to spend them here with us—every one of them.

NETTIE

Indeed you are!

FRED

Now, Dad, we want you here! I'm all broken up about this. We want you with us. Nettie——

NETTIE

Of course, Father. We wouldn't hear of it any other way. You know that.

MINICK

(*Slowly, thoughtfully*)

Well, of course, if you feel that way I don't want to make you children unhappy, but——

FRED

Then it's settled. Now, I don't want to hear of any more such foolishness out of you again, young man.

NETTIE

It's settled, and over!

FRED

Yes, and from now on, things are going to be different! We'll start to-night! I'll come home early from the office, and——

MINICK

M-m-m-m.

FRED

And we'll have a nice little dinner, just the three of us!

NETTIE

(*Taking her cue*)
Everything you like. Chicken with dumplings——

FRED

And after dinner, we'll spend the evening just with you! I'll tell you what! You can teach us pinochle. Will you do that, Dad?

MINICK

We'll see. We'll see.

NETTIE

And I'll tell you what else we're going to do——

(*The door bell rings.*)

that'll be Lil. At ten o'clock we'll mix up some of those little fizzes that you like, and——

(*Nettie goes to answer the bell.*)

FRED

Now, then, it's a date. And you're not going to disappoint us? Why, you had me scared out of seven years' growth! The idea of your——

(*Lil and Net are heard in the hall, ex-*

changing greetings. Lil enters, followed by Nettie.)

LIL

Oh—hello, Fred. Thought you'd be gone.

FRED

I'm just leaving.

(*Crossing for his coat.*)

LIL

Good morning, Mr. Minick.

MINICK

Good morning.

FRED

(*Preparatory to leaving*)
Well, I guess I'll——
(*Slaps his pockets to see if he has everything.*)

NETTIE

Father Minick, don't you want to go out for a while and take a walk?

FRED

Yes, Dad. Bright day like this. Clear your cold right up.

MINICK

Well—maybe I might.

NETTIE

Yes, that'll be——

(*Lula enters from the passage to answer the door. Stops as she sees that the visitor has already entered.*)

It's all right, Lula. I went.

(*As Lula turns to go.*)

Oh, Lula. Father Minick's going out for a walk. So you can give his room a real cleaning. Do his first. And, oh, Lula! Did you clear away the breakfast things?

LULA

Yes'm.

NETTIE

I'd hardly touched my coffee. I wonder if you'd mind getting me a fresh cup.

LULA

(*Sighs*)

No'm.

(*She goes.*)

NETTIE

Just put it on the table.

FRED

Want to take me as far as the L, Dad?

MINICK

You go ahead. It'll take me a while.

LIL

(*To Minick*)
It isn't as warm as it looks. You'd better bundle up.

MINICK

(*Starts toward his room.*)
I'll bundle.

FRED

Good-bye, Dad!
(*Reaches over and gives his father, as he passes, two reassuring slaps on the shoulders.*)

MINICK

Good-bye.
(*Goes into passage.*)

FRED

Don't forget to-night!
(*Turns back to the two women.*)
Going down on the L, Lil? Want to come with me?

LIL

Why—not just yet, Fred. Thought I'd stay and talk to Net a while.

FRED

You're up and out pretty early, all right.

LIL

(*The eternal answer.*)

I've been up for hours. I didn't close an eye all night. I heard the clock strike one—two—three. I dropped off for a minute around six.

(*A look of recognition on Fred's face.*)

FRED

That's too bad.

(*Crosses to Nettie.*)

Well, Nettie?

(*His look and tone savour of conciliation.*)

NETTIE

(*Without much life in her tone*)

Good-bye, Fred.

FRED

(*Is just back of her chair.*)

You were a peach, old girl.

(*Is rather awkward and sheepish about this, yet he wants to say it before he goes.*)

And I want you to know I appreciate it.

NETTIE

What else was there to do, Fred?

FRED

Just the same, you were mighty fine about it, and—don't you forget it. As far as the business is concerned—it's going to be all right—you'll see. We're going to have lots of money some day.

NETTIE

I hope so, Fred.

FRED

(*Awkwardly*)
Not sore at your old man, are you?

NETTIE

No.

FRED

I didn't mean to keep it from you. But every time I tried to tell you I lost my nerve. So I thought I'd wait until it really got going. I'm sorry.

NETTIE

(*Rises*)
I'm sorry too—about everything I said. I said terrible things, I know.

FRED

(*They embrace.*)
It's all right. I understand.

(*They kiss.*)

Peach!

(*Goes into the hall.*)

Good-bye, Lil.

(*The slam of the door; Nettie faces Lil again.*)

LIL

(*A silent observer of the reconciliation.*)
Well!

NETTIE

(*Sighs*)
Lil, what could I do? Father Minick just threatened to pack up and go to an Old Man's Home.

LIL

Net!

NETTIE

Just now!

LIL

And coming on top of that terrible session last night?

(*Nettie nods.*)

I can imagine.

NETTIE

(*Sits in desk chair.*)
Lil, after you and Jim left last night I had a kind of nervous chill. I was just like this.

(*She indicates, with hands tremulously rigid, just how terrible had been the ordeal.*)

LIL

Well, if I had a nervous chill every time, Jim

and I—h'm—you'll learn—— Why don't you come downtown with me? Do you good.

(*Lula enters the dining room with a cup of coffee.*)

NETTIE

Oh, Lula's cleaning and I've got my ordering to do. I don't know—maybe I will.

LULA

(*Calling*)
Your coffee's ready.

NETTIE

All right, Lula.

(*A glance over her shoulder.*)
Oh, bring it in here, will you? Lil, maybe you might like a cup of hot coffee. I can get another.

(*Rises, gets cup from Lula and returns to her desk. Lula exits.*)

LIL

I couldn't swallow a mouthful. I didn't eat a bite of breakfast. Black coffee was all I had, and I forced myself to drink that.

NETTIE

(*Sits again.*)
Well, I thought maybe it'd buck me up a little.

(*Sigh.*)
Of course, Lil, I don't have to tell you what it means to me, this having Father Minick in the

house. He'll be here for God knows how long. Of course I don't mean I'd have it any different, but there's no use fooling yourself. Here we are, stuck in this five-room flat, and no prospects of anything better for years to come. Everything tied up in that new business, and Father Minick——

(*A gesture.*)

It means no children for Fred and me—that's what it means.

LIL

Well, Net, you're taking a pretty gloomy view of it, I think. After all, I suppose lots of other people have had the same problem, and worked it out some way or other.

NETTIE

Maybe. But it doesn't look so simple to me.

LIL

(*Dismissingly*)

Oh, well!

(*Consciously changing the subject*:)

Tell me, what are you going to wear to-night?

NETTIE

What?

LIL

Daisy's party—what are you going to wear? You see, we'll be driving, and——

NETTIE

Lil!

LIL

What's the matter?

NETTIE

I forgot all about it! We can't go—that's all.

LIL

Can't go—what do you mean? It's the send-off part for Lou and—— Why can't you go?

NETTIE

We—we forgot, I tell you. We promised Father Minick we'd stay home.

LIL

But, Nettie, I don't—— What are you talking about? You've known for weeks——

NETTIE

Lil, we've got to stay with him. I told you about the scene we had.

LIL

Why, I never heard of such a thing. You certainly told Daisy——

NETTIE

I know, but—you see what's happened.

LIL

But, good heavens, Net! What'll Daisy say? She'll be calling you up any minute to——

NETTIE

Well, Lil, I can't help it—that's all. I wouldn't dream of——

LIL

She 'phoned *me* just before I left the house. It's going to be wonderful! You know the way Daisy is. They've chartered a whole bus, and they're going to pick everybody up around six-thirty.

NETTIE

Lil, I've told you what an awful——

LIL

She's 'phoning everybody to tell them what time. Net, you can't back out now.

NETTIE

Well, Lil, you know I'm crazy to go! It's just that——

LIL

But it sounds so silly. He's not a stranger here. And just to-night—he wouldn't mind.

NETTIE

But he would, because——

LIL

Now listen! It's going to be a marvellous affair! First we're driving out to Donahue's for one of those wonderful chicken dinners! Then we're going on to The Den!

NETTIE

(*Weakening*)
Oh, Lil!

LIL

I tell you, it's going to be marvellous!
(*Her voice rises on the word; she draws it out.*)
And from The Den we're going to the Early Hour Club, and Lord knows when we'll get home! Now don't be silly!

NETTIE

I don't know what to say. I'm afraid Fred wouldn't——

LIL

Of course he would.
(*Minick enters from the passage. He is wearing his hat and overcoat. At his entrance there is a confused and embarrassed stop on the part of the two women.*)

MINICK

(*As he crosses*)
Well!

NETTIE

(*Nervously*)
Oh—are you going for your walk, Father?

MINICK

Yep. Going right out.

NETTIE

(*Confusedly, following him*)
Well—Father Minick—uh—would you——

MINICK

(*Near the hall door. Stops.*)
Huh?

NETTIE

I was just wondering if——
(*Her speech trails off into nothingness. She looks helplessly at Lil, who tries to encourage her with a bit of pantomime urging.*)

MINICK

What's the matter?

NETTIE

Well, you see, Fred and I forgot all about a party that we're invited on to-night. It's a great big farewell party for some friends of ours that are going to Europe.

LIL

You see! I told you it would be all right.

NETTIE

Yes—I hope so.

(*Sitting on sofa.*)

LIL

My heavens, you can't let him tie you down like that!

NETTIE

No, I suppose not, but—(*a shift of mood*)—tell me, what are you going downtown for so early?

LIL

Field's advertise georgettes for $1.95—all colours—in the basement. I thought I'd get some flesh colour and make myself a little negligee. Did you see the one Marge has? Of course, she paid a million dollars for it, but I can copy it for practically nothing.

NETTIE

Are they hard to make?

LIL

There's nothing to them. Just two straight lengths, hanging right from the shoulder. Simple as a nightgown.

NETTIE

I wonder if I could make one.

LIL

Of course you could. Why don't you get some too? Look at it, anyway.

NETTIE

Well, maybe I will.

(*Lula enters from the passage.*)

I wonder if they have—— What is it, Lula?

LULA

Soap!

NETTIE

What?

LULA

I haven't got any soap for my cleaning!

NETTIE

(*Wearily crossing to her desk*)

All right, Lula. I'll put it on my list.

LULA

(*Starts to go then turns.*)

I got to have it right away. Ain't got a speck.

NETTIE

(*With exaggerated patience*)

I'm going in a minute, Lula. I'll have it sent right over.

LULA

Expect me to clean without cleanin' soap!

(*Exits into the passage.*)

NETTIE

Isn't it incredible! You'd think *I'd* forgotten it.

LIL

They're all alike. They never tell you till the last minute. . . . Are you ready?

NETTIE

Yes, I guess so.

(*Goes into the hall for her coat and hat, talking as she goes.*)

I wonder if they have any orchid—georgette, I mean. I think orchid would be good on me, don't you?

LIL

(*In doorway, powdering her nose.*)

Yes, orchid would be—or if they haven't orchid, what do you think?

NETTIE

Well—blue. But not that hard blue. You know that blue I wear. . . .

(*Has put on her hat, one arm now in coat sleeve.*)

Oh! If I'm going downtown, I'll have to tell Lula——

(*Comes into room.*)

Lula! Lula!

(*Lula appears in the passage door.*)

Lula, I won't be home to lunch. And Mr. Minick and I won't be home for dinner. There'll just be Father Minick. You know what there is. And Lula, I wouldn't bother to do much in this room. Go right ahead with the bedrooms. And do Father Minick's room first, so you'll be out of his way by the time he gets back. I'll be back about three. And Lula—don't sing while he's taking his nap.

LIL

Net, everything'll be picked over if we don't——

NETTIE

All right, Lil. And, oh, Lula—if Mrs. Stewart telephones—here I'll write it——

(*Writes the name on a slip of paper.*)

LIL

She may say Daisy Stewart.

NETTIE

Yes, Mrs. Stewart or Daisy Stewart. Tell her that Mr. Minick and I will be ready any time they come for us. Now, do you understand that?

(*Crossing to the table and putting the slip of paper there.*)

LULA

(*Miles behind*)
Miss who?

NETTIE

If Mrs. Stewart——

(*She gives up.*)
If anybody 'phones I'll be back at three.

LIL

Come on, Net.

NETTIE

All right, Lil. Listen, how wide is it?

(*Gets her purse from the desk.*)
How much do you think I'll need?

LIL

Let me see—two lengths straight from the shoulder—oh, I should think about three yards would be enough.

NETTIE

Three yards? That isn't *bad,* is it?

(*They are in the hall.*)
Three times a dollar ninety-five—how much is that?

(*The outer door slams.*)

(*Lula, back in the dining room, starts singing in a low voice as she gathers up one or two things from the table.*)

LULA

(*Singing*)

"Nobody knows de trouble I've seen——"

(*She appears in the dining room doorway, seeking the extra coffee cup.*)

"Nobody knows but——"

(*She spies it on the desk.*)

There it is.

(*She gathers it, then resumes the song, low-voiced, as she heads again for the dining room.*)

"Nobody knows de trouble I've seen——"

(*The last word or so is almost lost as she bends over the slip of paper that Nettie has placed on the table. Then, satisfied about that, she finishes the spiritual in a grand crescendo as she goes again into the dining room.*)

"Glory Hallelujah!"

(*Minick enters from the passage. He has his coat on one arm and is wearing his hat. In his arms, also, is his suitcase—the same one that he brought into the house when he came. It is partly packed—a few shirts piled on top of it indicate a possible reason for his adjournment to the living room. There is nothing hurried or furtive in his manner; he is a calm old man who has made his decision. He peers around for Lula as he enters.*)

MINICK

Lula!

(*He deposits the suitcase on the sofa.*)

LULA

(*Returns from the dining room, coffee cup still in hand.*)

Yeh?

MINICK

Where's my other shirts?

LULA

What you doin' that suitcase?

MINICK

Never mind. Where are they?

(*He throws his hat and coat over a chair.*)

LULA

They in the wash. What you want with them?

MINICK

When'll you have 'em done?

LULA

I irons Tuesday. What you up to, anyhow?

MINICK

(*Kneels and starts packing the remaining*

shirts which he carried in on top of the case.)

Tuesday, eh? And what's the name of that fella comes and takes your trunk away? Palmer'r something.

LULA

You mean Parmalee Transfer Company?

MINICK

That's him. Got an office right down the street.

LULA

What you want transfer company for?

MINICK

What do you think I want 'em for? I want 'em to come and take a trunk.

LULA

Mrs. Minick didn't tell me 'bout no trunk. What you going do?

MINICK

I know what I'm going to do.

LULA

If Mrs. Minick don't know about it she goin' be awful mad when she come home.

MINICK

That's all right.

(*He drops the lid of the suitcase.*)

Mad or no mad, I'm going.

LULA

What you mean—goin'! Mrs. Minick ain't goin' let you go no place.

MINICK

(*Still kneeling in front of the suitcase. He is strapping it now.*)

Let me! I'm not a child. I know what I want to do, and I'm going to do it. Think I was a plumb fool!

(*He gets to his feet, picking up the suitcase with an air of finality.*)

What's Nettie got to do with it! I got a right to be with my own kind of folks. I'm sorry for Fred and Nettie, but I can't be thinking of them all the time. There's young and there's old, and they got to be let go their own ways.

(*He is really talking aloud more than actually to Lula. Perhaps he himself is somewhat surprised to find himself shaping his new philosophy in speech.*)

LULA

I don't know what you talkin' about.

(*Mystified, she decides to give it up, and go back to her work. Minick's next words stop her at the dining-room door.*)

MINICK

(*Puts down suitcase, and plunges one arm into his overcoat. There is about him a new vigour; an air of satisfaction and determination.*)

I'll tell you what I'm talking about. If I want to go to the Home, they got no right to keep me from it, Fred and Nettie. I got my own life, same as anybody.

(*He realizes that unconsciously he has put into one line everything that he has been trying to say. This rather pleases him, and he repeats the line for his own enjoyment.*)

Yes, sir! I got my own life, same as anybody.

(*His mind still on that line, he reaches for his hat and settles it jauntily on his head. He smiles, and it is the quiet, satisfied smile of one who has solved his problem.*)

And I know just what I'm going to do with it.

(*He picks up the suitcase with a new strength and walks with spring and buoyancy toward the hallway and the door to freedom. Halfway across, he turns just for a second to toss a parting thought to the much-puzzled Lula.*)

I ain't going to waste it teaching pinochle to anybody!

CURTAIN

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